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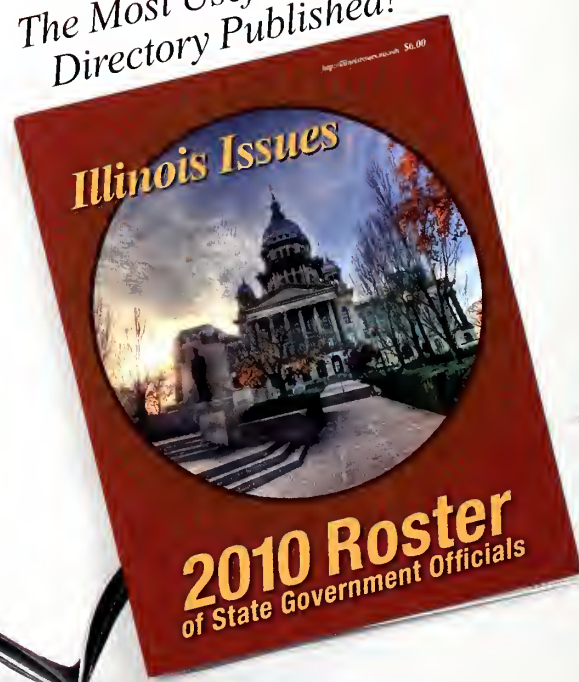
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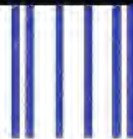


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Dana Heupel



## Other states have tackled the issue of political fundraising

by Dana Heupel

*"Here are two important things in politics: One is money, and I can't remember what the second one is."* — Mark Hannah, presidential campaign manager for William McKinley in 1896.

**T**hat axiom immerses political candidates in a never-ending whirlpool of fundraising and sometimes prevents potentially qualified challengers from seeking elective office. It also can breed ethical concerns. Witness the plight of Illinois' last two former governors: George Ryan is in prison; Rod Blagojevich is under indictment — both charged in political fundraising scandals.

A handful of states have tried to tackle some of the problems associated with political fundraising by enacting public financing for campaigns. Although Illinois' state budget problems make that idea unlikely here any time soon, there is new evidence, at least in legislative campaigns, that public financing might produce some desirable unintended results.

Laws in Arizona, Connecticut and Maine allow statewide and legislative

candidates to voluntarily qualify for public money for campaigns by living up to certain promises: They can only accept small contributions from individuals — none from corporations, unions, political action committees or party funds — and they can only spend what they receive from public funds and individual donors.

As to be expected, the laws in each state differ somewhat from one another, and severe restrictions govern how candidates can spend the public money. Brochures explaining the process can run as high as 100 pages. In Arizona, Connecticut and Maine, state campaigns are fully publicly funded. Hawaii, Minnesota and Wisconsin partially fund state campaigns, as does the federal government for presidential candidates.

Primarily, the intent of public financing is to provide more competition among candidates and to reduce the influence of special interests. Debate on whether it accomplishes those goals is ongoing. But recent research produces evidence that public financing may also produce some

desirable unintended consequences, at least in states where campaigns are fully funded by taxpayers.

"I did a survey of candidates in the 2008 elections, and I surveyed all six states where campaigns were publicly funded," says Michael Miller, a doctoral candidate at Cornell University and soon to be a political science professor at the University of Illinois Springfield. "What I found was that candidates [in Arizona, Connecticut and Maine] who accept full funding — in other words, they don't spend any time raising money — those candidates are spending about 10 percentage points more of their weekly time directly engaging the voting public. I don't see any effects for the programs for Minnesota, Wisconsin and Hawaii," where candidates get small subsidies but also spend time raising money on their own.

"When you eliminate fundraising from the necessary list of campaign tasks, you really alter candidate activities," he says.

Miller's finding that publicly funded candidates spend more time communi-



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cating with potential voters raised another question in his mind: "If campaigns are engaging voters directly, are more people voting?"

"In both Maine and Connecticut," he says, "I find that more people who show up and vote, say, for the president stick around and vote for the state House races where public funding is being used. ... Roll-off is diminished when public funding is present in those down-ticket state races." Miller says he was unable to analyze voting patterns in Arizona.

"To me, those twin findings really bear on a normative problem in American democracy: representation and voting. So you've got kind of a more 'small-D' democratic election happening, it seems to me, when public funding is present," Miller says.

He says public funding also may encourage candidates to run in districts that heavily favor the other party. A Republican candidate in Arizona, for instance, told Miller he harbored no illusion that he would win an election in his heavily Democratic district but said, "I thought it was really important for democracy for my neighbors actually to have a choice."

"It's just really refreshing," Miller says, "after speaking to a lot of politicians, to hear that sort of language."

"That said," he allows, "it's not all roses." In fully funded states, when opponents of candidates who accept the subsidies go beyond the spending limits, publicly funded candidates "keep getting checks" from the state under a provision called "matching funds." Opponents who don't want the publicly funded candidates to get more money "wait until the Saturday or Sunday before the election, have a bunch of ads or mailings ready to go, and just dump them on the electorate. ... I'm seeing a seriously altered spending behavior from those traditional candidates."

Miller is unsure whether the concept of publicly financed state elections will spread soon to other states but says a number of cities, such as Seattle and Portland, are looking into the idea for local elections. He says when he asks voters and taxpayers about the idea

For more information about public funding of state elections:

#### **Michael Miller's research:**

<http://sites.google.com/site/millerpolsci/research>

#### **Arizona law:**

<http://www.azcanelections.gov>

#### **Connecticut law:**

<http://www.ct.gov/seec/site>

#### **Maine law:**

<http://www.maine.gov/ethics/>

#### **Federal study:**

<http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d03453.pdf>

during his research, "they say, 'I don't know if you get a better government, but I think you err on the side of getting a more representative, responsive government.' And that, in the mind of a lot of citizens, is worth it."

Kent Redfield, a professor emeritus at UIS, says a key issue is "having enough money to be competitive. If your grant in a legislative election is not enough for people to feel like they can be competitive, they tend to take a pass on the public money. ... You could imagine that in Illinois, sure winners and sure losers would take [the public money], but you'd still have the legislative leaders and the big interest groups bankrolling the competitive elections."

Redfield says he believes public financing is "a worthy goal" that highlights some basic democratic principles, but he allows that "contributing money can be participation, too," citing a U.S. Supreme Court ruling that campaign contributions are constitutionally protected free speech. He says perhaps public funding is best used in judicial elections, where candidates are expected to be noncommittal on political issues.

At any rate, Redfield says, "I would not be optimistic about it happening anytime soon" in Illinois.

"It's about winning and losing, and money is a resource to determine who wins and loses."

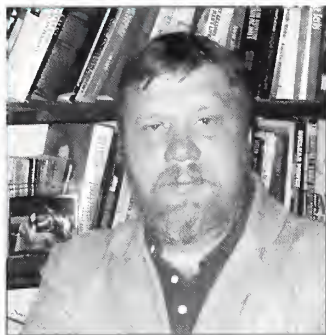
Dana Heupel can be reached at [heupel.dana@uis.edu](mailto:heupel.dana@uis.edu).

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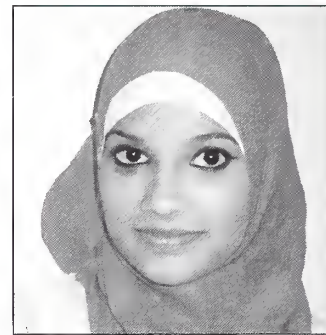
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Q-74Q



## Today's leaders could learn from a forward thinker from yesteryear

by James Krohe Jr.

**Y**ou would think that a governor who restored the state of Illinois' low reputation for creditworthiness while creating stable conditions for economic growth might be looked to by our perplexed state leaders as a model, if not worshipped as a saint. But today, Gov. Thomas Ford is remembered, if at all, for his role in suppressing the Mormon War of the 1840s, not for suppressing the rebellion of the state's creditors set off by the Panic of 1837.

The members of the General Assembly of 1836-37 demonstrated — not for the last time — that as economists, they are good politicians. Each part of the state had an infrastructure project that it expected would make it rich, and its elected representatives happily agreed to approve similar projects that every other section wanted so they could get their own. The result was a recklessly extravagant program of internal improvements that called for constructing the Illinois & Michigan Canal, laying 1,300 miles of railroad track (in a state that scarcely had a mile of decent wagon road) and making suitable for navigation "rivers" that until then floated only dead trees.

Work began in 1836, but a national financial panic in 1837 gutted the value of donated federal land whose sale was supposed to pay for most of it. The state government defaulted on its interest payments on the rest in 1841, and while stopgap financing kept the work going

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*It was this ability to judge the problems in a larger frame that distinguished Ford's handling of the crisis, along with his adroit handling of the General Assembly in the face of obstructionism, sectionalism, partyism and general do-nothingism.*

until 1842, not another shovelful of dirt was moved thereafter.

Public officials who call today's fiscal problems a "crisis" have not read their history. When Ford took the oath of office in 1842, state-chartered banks had failed, and their notes, which constituted the common currency, were worthless. With no money in circulation, the state was in effect closed for business. The state of Illinois was \$14 million in debt, the budget deficit was more than \$300,000 and there was, Ford famously reported, not enough cash in the till in Springfield to buy a postage stamp. The state was in the same fix as the overextended house-buyer stuck with a home worth less than what he owes on it.

"Every one [sic] had a plan of his own to restore the State to prosperity," Ford would write in his posthumous history of Illinois. The problem was most of those plans were impractical or imprudent. One faction wanted to raise cash by selling new grants of federal land, but Congress was in no mood to throw good acres after bad. Resorting to what Ford would call "oppressive and exterminating taxation" to pay off what the state owed was out of the question. The young state's economy was as shaky on its feet as a toddler, and asking it to carry a heavy tax load would have caused it to collapse.

Others counseled that the state should simply walk away from the failed banks and the canal debt. Ford appreciated that the stink of default would carry to the East Coast and beyond, where the sensitive nostrils of money men would pick it up. He called default an "irretrievable infamy" that would expose Illinois to the rest of the world as "a confederated band of unprincipled swindlers."

Ford saw that the first step out of this swamp was to reassure the people to whom the state owed money that they would get paid eventually. Ford also was canny enough to realize that it would be folly to surrender the canal because the I&M — that era's O'Hare and interstate system combined — was the surest means to expand the economy. He also divined that for the same reason it was in



the interests of the canal bond holders to extend the state more money to finish the canal.

It was this ability to judge the problems in a larger frame that distinguished Ford's handling of the crisis, along with his adroit handling of the General Assembly in the face of obstructionism, sectionalism, partyism and general do-nothingism. He scaled back the proposed building and borrowed \$1.6 million from money men in New York and London. In return, the state conveyed to them the canal property in trust as security. The job of finishing the I&M Canal was wisely left in the hands of trustees, most of whom were selected by the bondholders. ("We have had enough in our history," he wrote later, "of the management of money matters by public officers.")

Putting the canal effectively into hock took care of the principal on the debt. To cover the interest, Ford proposed a new tax on property of one mill — or 0.1 cent — per dollar of assessed valuation in 1845, increasing permanently in 1846 to a mill and a half, the proceeds to be sacredly devoted to the payment of the interest on the debts of the state. The governor's role here was crucial, Ford would write, because "the politicians on neither side, without a bold lead to the contrary by some one [sic] high in office, would never have dared to risk their popularity by being the first to advocate an increase of taxes to be paid by a tax-hating people."

The effect of these measures on Illinois finances was like that of the princess' kiss on the frog prince. Construction of the canal was resumed, and when it opened in 1848, goods and people invigorated an economy grown anemic from lack of trade. The debt load was lightened by \$5 million down to \$6 million, and sound money started circulating again. "This was the best that could be done," Ford would write with pardonable pride, "and it is wonderful, under the circumstances, that so much could be accomplished."

The last of the debts the legislators incurred in 1837 were paid off by their grandchildren in 1880.

As a result of the internal improvements fiasco, wrote historian Theodore Calvin Pease in 1918, "Illinois learned and learned much and had acquired ...

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***Now, as then, the state's fiscal problems have financial solutions. And now, as then, the political consensus needed to apply those solutions seems impossible to achieve.***

political experience and judgment which were to fit it for active and efficient participation in the great affairs of the union." Sadly, the lessons learned were quickly forgotten. Now, as then, lawmakers mistook a speculative boom as permanent and bet the house on it continuing. Now, as then, lawmakers blamed the near-bankruptcy on the current national recession rather than their own profligacy. Now, as then, lawmakers did not quite grasp that rebuilding state government's balance sheet required rebuilding the state's economy. In the 1840s, the state's industrial economy was immature; today it is atrophied, but in neither era was it able to generate the funds needed to run the state at politically acceptable levels of taxation.

Now, as then, the state government's fiscal problems have financial solutions. And now, as then, the political consensus needed to apply those solutions seems impossible to achieve. What is lacking now is what Illinois got in 1842 — a bold lead to the contrary by someone high in office. We are obliged to speculate why Illinois so often had the leaders it needed in past fiscal crises but not today. Coping with extraordinary situations sometimes turns ordinary men and women into leaders — certainly no one would have pegged Ford to be the prophet who brought Illinois out of the wilderness during the state's transition from frontier to industrial state — but not always.

Henry Horner — another judge-turned-pol — would keep a sick economy during the Depression from fatally infecting the social system. Why? Perhaps because he felt a personal responsibility for the plight of the poor that overwhelmed his political ambition. In 1933, when Horner was sworn in, relief for the state's unemployed was supplied mainly

by federal money — 99 percent of it in the fiscal year ending in 1933 — and the feds were demanding that the state do more to help its own.

Unfortunately, the state's horse-and-buggy tax system was inadequate to the demands of crisis. Horner, like his predecessor, Louis Emmerson, borrowed against a return to prosperity, but the proceeds were spent within a year. Horner pushed for and got a new state tax, on retail sales, in the face of opposition from both the courts and representatives of what were still a tax-hating people. Just as Ford shepherded state government from its frontier to the industrial age, so Horner helped it cope with the consequences of industrialism.

Is it possible that today's crisis is not quite extraordinary enough? Is the problem that our politicians are inadequate to solve the crisis or that the crisis is inadequate to motivate the politicians? No one is quite starving in Illinois, unless you count voters hungry for grownup leaders. Bad bond ratings or bankrupt social service agencies that serve politically marginal populations are like the ominous rattle in the car engine — worrisome, but most drivers won't tend to it until the car stops running. And the future does not have a representative in the General Assembly.

It would be nice if today's leaders would learn from Ford's forward thinking or Horner's sense of responsibility and tried to act like fiscal architects rather than by-the-hour builders. Nice, but unlikely, as Ford himself knew. "It is lamentably true that communities in the aggregate scarcely ever profit by the lessons of experience," he wrote. "The same evils and calamities, and from the same causes, occur again and again and find the people as little expecting them, every time they are repeated, as they were before; and they are every time just as blind about the remedy." □

*Note to readers:* The best edition of Thomas Ford's *History of Illinois from Its Commencement as a State in 1818 to 1847* was published in 1995 by the University of Illinois Press and includes annotations and an introduction by Rodney O. Davis.

*Guest columnist James Krohe Jr., a Highland Park free-lance writer, is a longtime contributor to Illinois Issues.*

# BRIEFLY

## The year of Lincoln

The Illinois Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission orchestrated 117 projects, most of which were free to the public, to commemorate the famous former Illinois resident's 200th birthday in 2009. Commission members say it took careful planning to pull off so many events across the state in a time of financial turmoil.

The commission was created in February 2006 to plan the bicentennial and dissolved at the end of January. Commission chair Marilyn Kushak says the first year was spent securing funding and planning

events. "It was very well organized and so by the start of this fiscal year we did not go back and ask for more dollars to finish up the year because we were very focused...and it went so smoothly," she says.

A series of reenactments of the presidential debates between Stephen Douglas and Lincoln — held at the original locations of the debates throughout the state — helped to kick off the celebration. Kushak says the commission worked to include residents of all ages and all areas

of Illinois in the festivities. "We really wanted to have Lincoln's legacy come alive and be able to touch as many people as often as we could."

Dave Blanchette, spokesman for the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, says that budget constraints led to creative concepts that drew audiences who might not have participated in a Lincoln event. Blanchette says since there was not much money for advertising, the commission tried to create publicity with unique events, such as a bicentennial motorcycle and a portrait of Lincoln made out of Post-it notes on the skyway of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum.

Both Blanchette and Kushak agree that President Barack Obama's speech at the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Birthday Party, hosted by the Abraham Lincoln Association, was the pinnacle event of the celebration. "It all culminated in the speech at the Lincoln banquet," Blanchette says. "It worked for him, and it worked wonderfully well for Springfield."

Kushak recalls the simultaneous reading of the Gettysburg address on Lincoln's 200th birthday as a particularly poignant event. The commission partnered with the Illinois State Board of Education to have students read the Gettysburg address aloud in an attempt to break the record for the most people reading it at one time.

Kushak says the record was not broken. However, she says finding a way for children to participate in the bicentennial was the most important aspect of the project. "The impact was having schoolchildren having a moment in their life that they are going to remember."

Kushak adds that collectors' items created specifically for the bicentennial will keep the memory of the event alive for years to come. She says she hopes mementos such as the bicentennial stamp and Christmas ornament will be passed on to future generations.

The bicentennial officially wraps up on Lincoln's 201st birthday, February 12.

*Janey Dunn*





## Quinn calls early-release plan a "big mistake"

Gov. Pat Quinn in January ended a policy that allowed prisoners to be released after serving only weeks of their sentences. Quinn called the plan a "big mistake."

The Associated Press reported the Illinois Department of Corrections was awarding prisoners months of early release time for good behavior in the first few days of their sentences, thus returning some violent offenders to the streets after they spent just a few weeks behind bars.

The plan, known as "Meritorious Good Time Push," began in September and resulted in the early release of more than 1,700 prisoners. Quinn says the prisoners remained under the supervision of the Illinois Department of Corrections after leaving prison. More than 50 offenders have since returned to prison because of parole violations or new offenses.

The General Assembly passed **SB1013**, which would require inmates to serve at least 60 days of their sentences before being eligible for good behavior credit. Quinn says the 60-day waiting period was previously an "unspoken policy" of the Illinois Department of Corrections. "It was not a rule. It wasn't written down," he said.

The Department of Corrections will now be required to inform local prosecutors of an inmate's release 14 days in advance. Quinn says he also plans to ask the Illinois General Assembly to reevaluate what types of offenses allow a prisoner to be eligible for early release. "The revolving door is something that we have to deal with," he said.

Quinn denied any knowledge of the plan, saying he first

learned of it through news reports. This contradicts earlier statements that he was aware of the plan but had instructed Illinois Department of Corrections Director Michael Randle not to include any violent criminals.

"There were mistakes made in judgment and the planning. It was not implemented the way that the governor had directed, and for that, as director of this agency, I take responsibility," Randle says. Quinn says he has no plans to fire Randle. "He made a mistake here. He takes responsibility for it. It will not be repeated," Quinn says.

Comptroller Dan Hynes, Quinn's Democratic opponent for governor, says Quinn's action is too little too late. "Governor Quinn's response has been totally inadequate and irresponsible, and it only compounds the awful judgment that allowed such a program to be implemented in the first place."

While Quinn says Meritorious Good Time Push was a bad idea, he says that the budget deficit and other problems in the Illinois prison system should be taken into context when evaluating the decision.

"The decision of the General Assembly this year was not to have any new revenue for our state government," he says. "We do need more revenue in order to protect public safety and maintain public safety."

"MGT Push" was not part of another plan Quinn announced in September to release nonviolent offenders early to save the state money.

*Jamey Dunn*

## Commission votes to sell Thomson

The federal government agreed to purchase Thomson prison amid ongoing controversies over moving suspected terrorists into the United States.

U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin and Gov. Pat Quinn announced in December in Washington, D.C., that President Barack Obama's administration has decided to buy Thomson prison in northwest Illinois with the intent of transferring some detainees there from Guantanamo Bay.

Top members of Obama's administration sent a letter to Quinn detailing the plan. According to the letter, the prison would be run as two separate facilities, so federal inmates and terror suspects would never interact. The prisoners from Guantanamo would not be allowed visitors other than their lawyers. The feds also plan to beef up security to a level that they claim will exceed the safeguards of a federal "supermax" prison.

Obama called for the closure of the Guantanamo Bay prison, which holds more than 200 detainees, including suspected terrorists. Finding a place to house

some of these prisoners in the United States has proved to be one of the main hitches in the president's plan. Congress must also approve moving the prisoners to American soil.

The plan goes ahead with the support of an Illinois legislative commission that makes recommendations regarding the closure of state facilities. Members of the Commission on Government Forecasting and Accountability say the Federal Bureau of Prisons plans to purchase the prison to alleviate crowding in the federal system regardless of whether Congress approves the transfer of Guantanamo prisoners.

Sen. Dave Syverson, a Rockford Republican, said at the hearing that he believes state lawmakers will not be able to block federal officials if they want to move terror suspects to Illinois. He said that he is opposed to closing Guantanamo Bay, but Illinois should not miss out on the economic growth that a federal takeover of the prison could mean for an area facing double-digit unemployment rates. Rep. Syverson and Rep. Rich Myers of Colchester cast the two Republican

votes in favor of the sale.

Thomson was completed in 2001 and has been virtually empty since. Opponents to the sale say Illinois should use the facility to take pressure off crowded state prisons.

Republicans on the state and federal level accused both Quinn and Obama of forcing the deal through without transparency, legislative approval or voter support. They say the recent terrorist attempt to blow up a plane bound for Detroit in December should give Quinn pause when considering housing terrorists in Illinois prisons.

"This has been rushed. It has not been thought through thoroughly. It has not been vetted thoroughly," says Rep. Matt Murphy, a Republican candidate for lieutenant governor from Palatine.

Durbin countered such criticisms by claiming the plan has support from residents of the area surrounding Thomson. "We have looked at it carefully and closely, and we have done it with the understanding that, time and again, the people of our state of Illinois have risen to the challenge to serve this nation," he said at a news conference in December.

*Jamey Dunn*



## BRIEFLY

### New thoughts about an old weed

Field pennycress (*Thlaspi arvense*), a member of the mustard family, is a common Midwestern weed that has fairly well stayed out of the way of farmers. Its life cycle runs through the winter and barely overlaps row crops such as corn and soybeans. Yet, its prolific seeds contain more than 35 percent oil, compared with 16 percent for soybeans, so pennycress has become the newest darling touted for biofuel production. An acre of pennycress can produce 115 gallons of biodiesel, more than twice the 55 gallons by soybeans. And because it is a winter-over crop, pennycress doesn't enter into the food vs. energy debate.

"Basically, it is a second shift in the agribusiness economy, and land that otherwise would lie dormant over the winter months can be put to work creating a new generation of biofuels," says Rep. Aaron Schock, Republican of Peoria. "It is a biofuel grown alongside a food product."

One of Schock's first acts as a freshman congressman was to persuade the U.S. Department of Agriculture to add pennycress to its list of alternative crops for biofuel so farmers could get crop insurance to grow it. "No private insurance company would insure a weed," he says. "Nobody knew what pennycress was a year ago."

In addition, Schock obtained a \$500,000 fiscal year 2010 appropriation in the Energy and Water Conservation Act for a Peoria-based company, BioFuels Manufacturers of Illinois (BMI), to continue plans to use the native plant as a feedstock for biofuel. The company works closely with the National Center for Agricultural Utilization Research in Peoria, which has studied the plant and its possibilities for commercialization for the past several years. BMI also gets research assistance from Western Illinois University.

Pennycress has several features attractive to farmers in addition to its high oil content, which acre for acre is about equal to canola oil. Farmers can use conventional equipment such as seed drills

or grass seeders to plant the small (400,000 per pound) seeds at a rate of 2.5 pounds per acre, shooting for 500,000 plants per acre. They can harvest the crop with conventional combines and expect a yield of 1,500 to 2,500 pounds per acre. Continued research should boost those numbers even higher, according to BMI.

The startup company wants to process pennycress at a new 45-million-gallon biofuels plant in Mapleton in Peoria County. However, a planned groundbreaking last summer had to be postponed for at least a year or more because of funding challenges, says Sudhir Seth, president of BMI. He says the Illinois departments of Agriculture and Commerce and Economic Development are receptive to the biofuel plan. "Everybody in the administration is aware of the issues, but some politics and administrative inertia are pushing us back."

Pennycress production may get some state help through legislation signed by Gov. Pat Quinn in November and effective last month. It provides a guarantee of up to \$3 billion in state-backed financing to support energy projects. Administered by the Illinois Finance Authority, the law increased the loan guarantee authority from \$75 million to \$225 million for agricultural businesses.

Seth says his company plans to apply for funds under the new law. He says it will also apply for grants from the U.S. Department of Energy, which announced in December its intention to distribute more than \$600 million in federal fund-

ing to next-generation biofuels.

The federal appropriation will allow the company to continue to pursue pennycress as a biofuel until other funding becomes available. However, Seth says another concern has been getting enough seeds to plant the acres needed. "Fortunately, we found enough progressive farmers who came forward and volunteered" to plant a seed considered a weed. The first year they planted just 30 acres, but for the 2009-2010 growing season they've put in 1,000 acres. The next year, Seth says they should have enough seed stock to plant 50,000 acres of pennycress. The company plans to ramp up to a half million acres by the 2014-2015 growing season to have enough to process into biofuel.

"If this gets popular and accepted as a viable second crop, then acreage is not a problem," Seth says. "Illinois has lots of acres."

Beverley Scobell



Field pennycress (*Thlaspi arvense*)

For updated news see the *Illinois Issues* Web site at <http://illinoisissues.uis.edu>

## Dirty needle trade-in gets federal nod

Programs that allow drug users to trade in used needles for clean ones in an attempt to curb the spread of HIV and other diseases transmitted through dirty syringes got a nod of support from the federal government.

Congress had banned the use of federal dollars for such programs since 1989. However, lawmakers voted to lift the ban in December. With funding cuts looming, directors of Illinois needle exchange programs hope the feds will eventually send some money their way.

Needle exchange programs are often part of a larger strategy known as harm reduction, which posits that it is in the interest of public health to help addicts avoid some of the risks associated with substance abuse. "The harm reduction perspective is that it's not about morals. It's about keeping people safe and alive and healthy," says John Peller, director of government relations for the Aids Foundation of Chicago.

Harm reduction programs often provide multiple services such as vaccinations, information on safe-sex practices and assistance entering rehabilitation programs. They have permanent locations and go out into the community in mobile units. Peller said needle exchange is often the first step in an addict's road to recovery.

The state's recent budget woes have left Illinois' syringe exchange programs — 10 statewide — scrambling for funding to keep their operations afloat. Dan Bigg, director of Chicago Recovery Alliance, says that his organization faces a 40 percent budget cut this year. "We have never been in this much financial peril," he says. "We're fighting for our existence."

While the federal ban was lifted in a budget bill, the legislation contains no specific funding for needle exchange. Supporters of harm reduction say that a relatively small investment from the feds could go a long way. "Nationally, \$50 million would have a major impact," Bigg says.

Peller argues that exchanges save tax money by reducing the spread of HIV and hepatitis. The rate of HIV infections in Illinois due to injection drug use has steadily declined in recent years, according to the Illinois Department of Public Health.

Opponents say money is more efficiently invested in 12-step addiction recovery programs, and public money should not be spent "enabling" destructive behavior. "Weaning the drug addicted completely off their drug of choice is infinitely more helpful," says David E. Smith, director of the Illinois Family Institute.

Even if federal funding doesn't come, harm reduction organizations in Illinois are encouraged that an end to the ban might result in more widespread acceptance of their work, especially from law enforcement and the general public. "What will happen will be that local state's attorneys will be much more comfortable with needle exchange programs going on in their locales," says Tom Hughes, an Illinois Public Health Association lobbyist.

Peller says lifting the ban may help organizations such as his find money from other sources. "It's an endorsement from the feds and from Congress and the president. They're saying it's OK to fund needle exchanges and to operate them."

Janey Dunn



## Asian carp lawsuit requests shutdown of Chicago locks

Two Chicago waterways — one a busy recreational passageway, the other a major thoroughfare for commercial barge traffic — face potential closure as Michigan and other Great Lakes states push the U.S. Supreme Court to protect Lake Michigan from Asian carp.

The invasive species is known for its high consumption of plankton and propensity to crowd out other species (see *Illinois Issues*, January, page 10). Some officials fear the fish will move through locks on the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal and the Calumet-Sag Channel, providing an opportunity for introduction of the non-native fish to Lake Michigan.

Michigan's attorney general filed suit against Illinois, Chicago's Metropolitan Water Reclamation District and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in December, not long after a massive fish kill on the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal resulted in one bighead Asian carp rising to the water's surface. Some carp may have sunk to the bottom of the canal because of weather conditions.

Although the flow-reversed canal was lauded as a marvel when built, opponents argued that the system lowered water levels in Lake Michigan and other Great Lakes, resulting in negative effects to wildlife and navigation. Michigan's current case stems from a 1922 lawsuit over the controversy.

Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Wisconsin and the Canadian province of Ontario have all joined Michigan's lawsuit in support of closing the locks. President Barack Obama's administration is opposing the lawsuit, calling it premature.

"When you're talking about the Great Lakes, you're talking about hundreds of thousands of jobs," says Nick De Leeuw, spokesman for the Michigan attorney general. "It's a very serious issue, and these other states certainly realize that." The Great Lakes' \$7 billion fishing and tourism industry risks significant harm if Asian carp were to invade, De Leeuw says.

On the flip side, according to the water reclamation district, Chicago would see widespread flooding during heavy rains if it is forbidden to use the locks for flood control. The district is asking that if the court closes the locks to navigation, the city still be allowed to use them to avoid flooding.

The water reclamation district also contends that Asian carp won't fare well enough in the Great Lakes ecosystem to be a nuisance because there is not sufficient plankton to support a large number. "It seems like a whole lot of hullabaloo over science that doesn't exist," a district spokeswoman says.

According to the barge trade group American Waterways Operators, the barges that travel through the two locks carry millions of dollars' worth of essential goods and commodities. If transported any other way, those goods, like road salt and home heating oil, would likely cost more.

"There are a lot of implications," says Lynne Whalen, spokeswoman for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The federal agency opposes the move to close the locks but is taking other steps, such as underwater electric barriers, to deter carp migration.

Rachel Wells



## Scientists look to tie floodplains, farms

After the success of river conservancy projects in the state, experts are looking at ways to more effectively use land surrounding the Mississippi and Illinois rivers.

The Nature Conservancy returned the land at its Spunky Bottoms and Emiquon preserves, both located on the Illinois River, from drained agricultural areas to wetlands. Spunky Bottoms covers more than 2,000 acres in west central Illinois, including 833 acres owned by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. Emiquon is 7,100 acres southwest of Peoria in Fulton County. According to the conservancy, Emiquon is one of the largest wetland projects in the country outside the Florida Everglades (for more on Emiquon, see *Illinois Issues*, July/August 2009, page 13).

Yet, it is not feasible to stop using all the land around the Illinois and Mississippi rivers for agriculture. That is where Sylvia Secchi and Jonathon Remo, professors and researchers at Southern Illinois University Carbondale, come in. They are looking for ways to return land along the rivers to floodplains that could still be used for farming.

Secchi says that farmers could grow crops used for biofuel, such as switchgrass, in flood-prone areas. However, she says farmers would have to be paid subsidies to make up for the profits they would lose by growing nontraditional crops.

These subsidies might not come solely from taxpayer dollars. Secchi says that restoring the floodplain would have many tangible benefits to the surrounding areas. "Dismantling levees in rural areas from Rock Island to St. Louis and letting the Mississippi run its course would decrease the risk of flooding in riverside cities and towns," she says. Secchi adds that it would also improve water and soil quality. The Nature Conservancy awarded her a three-year \$112,536 grant to continue her research.

Secchi says that subsidies for farmers could come from insurance companies, local municipalities and "anybody that has a stake in property that has value on the floodplain." She is focusing her research on quantifying the possible benefits of the concept. Secchi said that if the benefits can be accompanied with estimated monetary worth, people will be more likely to see the merit of the idea.

"It has to work for the farmers, and farmers have to be convinced that it works," she says. "You can tell farmers, 'Blah blah blah,' but they say, 'Show me the money.'"

Remo says that using the land along the rivers for agriculture will also keep people from developing it into homes and businesses that could be in danger of flooding in the future.

The research focuses on areas of the Illinois River south of Peoria and the Mississippi River in southern Illinois and above St. Louis. Remo says they are starting with small pilot programs, and the project will kick off in earnest if they receive a National Science Foundation grant in the spring.

Remo says if the project goes well, it could provide a "road map" for floodplain management, not only for the state but the entire world.

Jamey Dunn



Ken Anderson, a professor at Southern Illinois University Carbondale, holds a piece of amber. He recently discovered the oldest amber on record.

## Illinois amber grabs spotlight

A 320 million-year-old seam of coal in southern Illinois is at the center of worldwide attention for geologists who study amber, the fossilized drops of resin oozed by coniferous trees and flowering plants to seal injuries. The find is notable because it raises questions about what we know from the fossil record about the evolution of early plant life.

"It challenges what you thought you knew," says Ken Anderson, professor of organic geochemistry at Southern Illinois University Carbondale. "We did not expect to find amber in coal that old, and we were not expecting to find the type of amber we found."

Scientists classify the most common type of amber into two major categories: resin from gymnosperms, which are coniferous trees — pines, spruces and firs — and resin from angiosperms, which are flowering plants. This classification is based on the chemistry of amber's compounds, particularly terpenoids, which have distinct patterns in ambers from conifers and in ambers from flowering plants.

The dozen or so droplets of amber Anderson and his graduate assistant found in Illinois are older by about 70 million years than the oldest known amber found in other parts of the world.

"The age we're talking about — 320 million years old — predates the emergence of gymnosperms, conifers," says Anderson. "We thought what we found must be some early predecessor of those trees. But it turned out the amber is more like you'd find from angiosperms, flowering plants that didn't emerge until 100 million years ago, much, much later in the fossil record."

But Anderson stresses that he is not concluding the amber came from flowering plants, merely that the resin appears to resemble angiosperms. "The chemistry alone is not enough."

The next step is to go back into the coal mines to try to find amber samples associated with identifiable fossils, so scientists can be sure a resin came from a specific plant and be able to date it. He says that even with the extensive coal mining done in the state, the best chance of finding well-preserved fossils is in the rock ceiling and floor surrounding coal seams.

Anderson says there is much work to be done before this state's amber changes the current assumptions about plant evolution, but "right now, Illinois is the record holder."

Beverley Scobell





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# THE PENSION CHASM

Analysts project state retirement systems will need \$131 billion to cover benefits, but there's only \$46 billion in the bank

analysis by Charles N. Wheeler III

To say Illinois faces a hole in funding its public employee pension systems is like saying the Grand Canyon is an impressive ravine or the Mindanao Trench a good-size gully.

Indeed, "hole" is hardly an appropriate word. "Abyss" and "chasm" come readily to mind, with "bottomless pit" not too far away.

One fact seems indisputable: The commitments Illinois has made to provide retirement security for more than 700,000 downstate teachers, state workers and university employees pose the greatest financial challenge the state ever has faced. Consequently, pension reform is expected to be a key issue during the current spring session of the General Assembly.

The dollars can't be argued. When the books are closed on the current fiscal year on June 30, legislative analysts project the five retirement systems for which state government is responsible will need roughly \$131 billion to cover benefits already earned by public workers, with only \$46 billion in expected assets to cover the costs, or about 35 cents on the dollar. The other \$85 billion represents the unfunded liability, an obligation the state must meet but for which no funding source exists.

Nor can the state walk away from the commitment, as a private sector employer can do through bankruptcy. The Illinois Constitution guarantees that once earned, pension benefits can-

not be diminished or impaired. Even if the state were to abolish its public employee retirement systems today, every covered worker would be entitled to the benefits he or she has earned up to the moment the systems disappeared.

How much is \$85 billion? Well, it's roughly three times last year's total receipts into the state's main checkbook account, about \$29 billion. Or about \$6,600 for each of the 12.9 million folks the U.S. Census Bureau says live here. And it's eight times greater than the comparable figure of two decades ago, when the state's unfunded liability was slightly more than \$10 billion at the end of fiscal year 1990.

Financial experts warn that the continued unchecked growth of the pension debt threatens to reach a "tipping point" beyond which the state won't be able to reverse a fiscal slide into bankruptcy.

"The radical cost cutting and huge tax increases necessary to pay all the deferred costs from the past would become so large that many businesses and individuals would be driven out of Illinois, thereby magnifying the vicious cycle of contracting state services, increasing taxes and loss of the state's tax base," says R. Eden Martin, president of the Commercial Club of Chicago, a civic group.

Martin's dire prediction came in a minority report to the Pension Modernization Task Force, a panel created last year at the behest of lawmakers to study

the issue. In its final report, issued last November, the panel provided a comprehensive overview of the problem but offered no solutions.

Marked differences between members representing business interests and those from labor and its allies prevented the task force from reaching broad-based consensus on what steps Illinois should take to stop the ongoing financial death spiral. But no one contested the chief reason for the huge unfunded liability: For decades, governors and lawmakers from both political parties have chosen to spend available revenues on education, health care and other current programs rather than sock enough away to pay for the pension benefits workers were earning.

The dollars not put into the retirement kitty in turn did not earn any return on investment or compound over the years, so the gap grew even larger. More recently, the recession and near collapse of Wall Street sliced the value of the systems' invested assets by some \$18 billion, more than a quarter, since FY 2008.

"The deadly combination of nearly 30 years of systematic state underfunding of its employer contributions to the pension systems, followed by the cataclysmic decline in asset values caused by the national meltdown in financial markets over the last year, combined to create an all-time high in the state's unfunded pension liability," noted the

Center for Tax and Budget Accountability, a Chicago-based think tank, in testimony to the task force.

Moreover, over the years, Springfield political leaders have enhanced retirement benefits without providing full funding for the new costs. For instance, in the late 1990s, the formulas by which benefits are calculated were changed to allow teachers, state employees and university personnel to earn larger pensions more quickly, without corresponding increases in member contributions to cover fully the additional cost to the systems.

And in some instances, actuarial projections proved off target. The early retirement incentive program for state workers enacted in 2002 was expected to add slightly more than \$600 million to the unfunded liabilities of the State Employees' Retirement System. But significantly more state workers opted to retire than anticipated, at younger ages and with higher benefits, so the final price tag was \$2.4 billion, four times higher than the original estimate.

For many years, the accepted practice was for the state to cover pension system expenditures in a given year, with members' contributions and investment income used to build reserves for the future, according to a 2007 report by Comptroller Dan Hynes. The policy was abandoned in the early 1980s, though, when economic conditions worsened and state revenues weakened, leading to only modest increases in state contributions even as retirement costs soared.

In 1981, Hynes reported, the state kicked in \$406 million, while pension systems spent \$431 million. By 1995, the state contribution increased to \$519 million, but system expenditures increased to \$1.9 billion, according to the comptroller's report.

The alarming trends caught lawmakers' attention, and several schemes were devised to increase state contributions incrementally over long periods of time, so that at some future point, the systems' assets covered at least 90 liabilities, a level that actuaries consider tantamount to full funding.

A plan enacted in 1989 envisioned a seven-year increase in state contributions, followed by annual payments suf-

ficient to cover benefits earned each year and to amortize the unfunded liability in full over 40 years.

At the time, the five systems were funded at close to 58 percent, with assets slightly more than \$14 billion and obligations of almost \$25 billion.

But the plan — which was not mandatory — faltered when state budget makers ignored its requirements in favor of allocating more dollars to ongoing programs.

The 1989 law was replaced by a new funding arrangement in 1995. That called for a 15-year, gradual buildup in state contributions, followed by annual contributions at a level percent of payroll from 2011 through 2045, at which point the systems' assets were to cover 90 percent of liabilities. To ensure compliance, the new law made its required annual contributions a continuing appropriation, a provision that mandates the state comptroller to transfer the specified amount to each system even if the budget does not include it.

But the 1995 plan also was seriously flawed. Contribution levels were set too low in its early years to cover the costs of benefits earned each year plus interest on the unfunded liability, the sum needed just to maintain the status quo. Under its funding schedule, the deficit is projected to continue to grow until topping out at \$150 billion in 2031, before dropping to \$35 billion in 2045, when the systems would be 90 percent funded.

Despite the plan's shortcomings, the economic boom of the 1990s, coupled with a major actuarial change that listed assets at current fair market value rather than at the initial acquisition cost, helped push the systems to their highest funded level in memory by FY 2000, with some \$46 billion in assets to cover about \$62 billion in liabilities, roughly 75 percent funding.

Since then, it's been all downhill, as economic downturns bookending the 2000s prompted lawmakers and Gov. Rod Blagojevich to resort to pension borrowing and pension holidays to free up money for other uses. A \$10 billion bond sale in 2003 was used to cover a portion of the 2003 and all of the 2004 contributions under the 1995 law. Two years later, the governor and legislature

rewrote the 1995 law to cut some \$2.3 billion from required contributions in FY 2006 and FY 2007, and last year Gov. Pat Quinn and lawmakers agreed to sell \$3.5 billion in pension notes to cover FY 2010 contributions.

Meanwhile, the systems closed their books on FY 2009 with assets of \$48.7 billion and liabilities of \$126.5 billion, leaving an unfunded liability of nearly \$77.8 billion, for a 38.5 percent funded ratio.

Facing such numbers, all parties agree something must be done. What, though, is a topic of heated debate.

Business leaders concede that chronic underfunding is the main reason the pension debt has increased more than eight fold in the last 20 years. But they see another major factor at work: pension benefits that are too generous to retirees and too expensive for the state to afford.

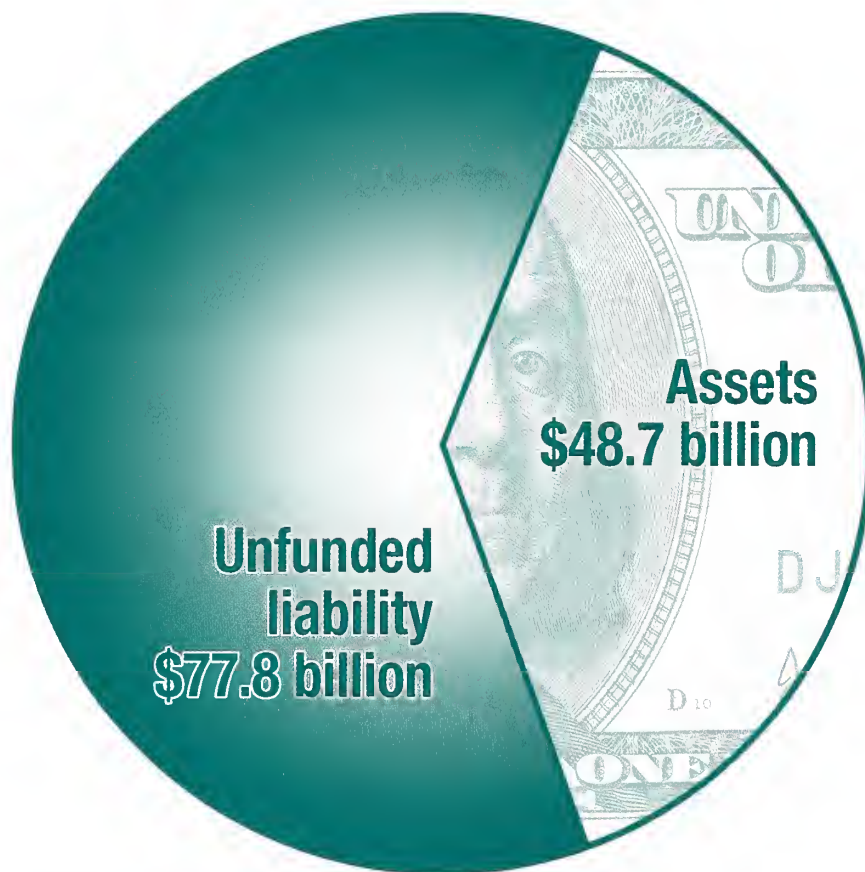
"The level of pension benefits provided by the state's plans generally exceeds those available in the private sector — i.e., available to taxpayers who pay the state's bills," the Commercial Club's Martin contended in his report. "The state's pension plans must be reformed and made less costly."

The five systems generally allow employees to retire with full benefits at age 60, a much younger age than allowed in private sector plans, and their monthly annuities are calculated on more favorable terms than those available for private workers. In addition, retirees receive 3 percent compounded cost-of-living increases annually, something virtually unheard of in the corporate world.

Moreover, many private sector employers no longer offer defined benefit plans, in which retirees are promised a certain amount for life, but instead offer defined contribution plans, in which the company agrees to contribute a certain sum each year into an employee's retirement savings account.

"A substantial disparity thus exists between pension benefits generally available in the private sector and the state's pension plans," Martin wrote in the minority report. "This disparity should not continue, for two reasons. First, the state cannot afford it. Second, maintaining such a disparity is unfair to





Total liability \$126.5 billion

taxpayers — who largely work in the private sector — who must pay higher taxes to support the more generous and more costly benefits provided to the state's employees."

Not surprisingly, labor organizations dispute the business characterization of the state's retirement systems, citing the findings of the task force's benefits subcommittee, which compared Illinois' benefits package with those offered by other public employers in four areas: retirement age, employee contribution rates, retirement formulas and cost-of-living adjustments.

"In the four categories that the subcommittee studied, Illinois' state-funded retirement systems were generally found to be in the statistical median," members concluded.

In addition, the subcommittee found the normal costs of the state's retirement systems — the amount needed each year to cover benefits earned that year — to be less than those of neighboring states and of private sector employers, chiefly because almost 80

percent of the workers covered by the state plans are not eligible for Social Security, so the state does not pay a federal tax on their salaries.

In contrast, private sector employers must pay a 6.2 federal payroll tax to provide Social Security coverage for their workers, and on average contribute 4.4 percent of payroll to 401(k) and other retirement plans, for a total cost of 10.6 percent, compared with state government's normal cost, which averages about 9 percent of payroll.

Nor does the typical retiree reap a windfall upon leaving his or her job. Annuities for retired state workers average slightly more than \$22,000 a year for the 95 percent of retirees eligible for Social Security and about \$28,000 for the 5 percent who are not, according to financial reports from the State Employees Retirement System.

The average annuity for retired teachers is about \$43,000 and for retired university workers about \$29,000. Neither group receives Social Security benefits for its members' years in public service.

"The level of benefits is modest, comparable to national averages of public employee retirement systems and of our neighboring states," said Anders Lindall, spokesman for the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees Council 31, which represents more than 40,000 state government employees. "And the cost of benefits is not only in line with other states, it's less than the private sector. The state doesn't pay Social Security in most cases, and participants make significant contributions to their own pensions."

Reasonable or not, business leaders insist the state can't afford the current retirement plans. Some argue the state should dump the guaranteed benefit plans and switch to defined contribution plans for all new hires, and, if constitutionally permissible, for current workers' future retirement. Advocates concede, though, that the initial costs of moving to a defined contribution plan might be more than the state can handle at this time.

In the alternative, the business com-

munity is pushing for setting up a second tier of pension benefits for new employees that would reduce future pension costs to the state and track more closely private sector cutbacks on employee benefits.

Among the changes they'd like to see:

- Raising the normal retirement age to 67 and the early retirement age to 62, in both cases for workers who've logged at least 10 years on the job. Currently, teachers can retire at age 60 with 10 years of service, while university workers need only eight service years at age 60. State employees can retire with full benefits under the so-called "Rule of 85" — when an individual's age plus years of service equals 85 — allowing someone who's worked full-time since age 25 to retire at 55 with full pension.
- Reducing the annual rate at which employees earn benefits to 2 percent of salary for workers not covered by Social Security and to 1.5 percent of pay for those under Social Security. At present, teachers, university personnel and about 3,000 state workers not eligible for Social Security accrue benefits at 2.2 percent a year, while other state employees covered by Social Security earn 1.67 percent of final average salary.
- Changing the provisions used to calculate benefits to exclude base salary in excess of the Social Security Covered Wage Base — \$106,800 in 2010 — and to average pay over eight years, rather than four.
- Limiting the annual cost-of-living adjustment to 3 percent or one-half of the Consumer Price Index, whichever is less, applied to an annuitant's starting pension amount. Now, the annual adjustment is 3 percent, compounded.
- Reducing the amount new employees would pay toward their retirement benefits by 13 percent to 15 percent, depending on the system.

Business leaders would apply the same standards to current employees for benefits they earn going forward but concede that the courts might decide

the change violates the constitutional provision that forbids impairing pension benefits. In that case, they argue, current workers should be required to contribute more for their pensions, an average of 11 percent for those not covered by Social Security and 7 percent for those who are. Currently, workers without Social Security average almost 9 percent, while those eligible are paying 4 percent.

In his budget proposal last year, Quinn embraced similar provisions for a second tier of benefits for new hires and increased contributions from current workers, which he said would reduce the state's pension liabilities in 2045 by \$162 billion. The governor later backed off, though, under withering criticism from organized labor and its allies, and legislation embodying the changes was never called for a vote.

Similar efforts to revamp pension system benefits are likely this spring and may appear attractive as lawmakers grapple with a budget deficit of unprecedented magnitude. But adding a second tier of reduced benefits would provide few immediate savings, according to analysts with the Commission on Government Forecasting and Accountability. "Because the reduction in benefits would apply only to newly hired employees, there is very little change in the total actuarial liability in the near future," they said in an April report.

Other policy experts argue that public pensions should not be the scapegoat for what they view as the root of the state's fiscal problems, an outdated revenue structure that does not track well Illinois economic activity in the 21st century.

"Despite oft-repeated claims to the contrary, the primary cause of the state's pension funding woes have very little, if anything, to do with the over-generous benefits, high employee head counts or inflated costs," the Center for Tax and Budget Accountability told the task force.

"The state's failure to make its required employer contributions to the five pension systems can be traced to one, simple cause," according to the center's analysis: a state fiscal system "that is so poorly designed it, for decades, failed to generate enough

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***"The state's failure to make its required employer contributions to the five pension systems can be traced to one, simple cause:" a state fiscal system "that is so poorly designed it, for decades, failed to generate enough revenue growth to both maintain service levels from one year to the next, and cover the state's actuarially required employer contribution to its five pension systems."***

***— The Center for Tax and Budget Accountability***

revenue growth to both maintain service levels from one year to the next, and cover the state's actuarially required employer contribution to its five pension systems."

The structural deficit posed a difficult choice for elected officials over the years: fully fund pensions and dramatically cut services, or skip some of the pension payment and keep as many services as possible, the center said.

"Not wanting to implement dramatic cuts in spending on essential services, the legislature and various governors elected to instead divert revenue from making the required employer pension contribution to maintaining services like education, health care, public safety and caring for disadvantaged populations," the center argued. "Effectively, the state used the pension systems as a credit card to fund ongoing service operations."

Because the state's current tax structure motivates public officials to short-change contributions to the retirement systems so as to preserve funding for



immediate needs, “pension funding reform is not possible without enhancing state revenue,” concluded the task force’s subcommittee on funding.

In theory, state officials could choose to slash spending on other programs to pay down the pension debt, the subcommittee said, “but there is little likelihood that the General Assembly could make such cuts without reducing social services and programs to politically unacceptable levels.”

In addition to calling for new revenue — in essence higher taxes — subcommittee members also suggested state leaders should:

- Consider replacing the current funding plan with “a new, rational payment schedule, one that front-loads costs,” unlike the 1995 law, which allows pension debt to grow for another 20-plus years.
- Study the feasibility of selling select-

ed state assets, such as the Illinois Tollway, to raise immediate cash for infusion into the retirement systems.

- Examine the possibility of issuing additional pension obligation bonds, but only when market conditions are favorable and only as a debt swap, in which proceeds would be used to refinance a portion of the existing unfunded liability, but not as a replacement for the required annual contribution to cover actuarial normal cost plus interest on the debt.

In testimony to the task force subcommittee, the center proposed replacing the 1995 law with a new long-term plan that would require annual state payments based on a declining percentage of the overall state budget, with a goal of hitting 90 percent funding at the end of the amortization period.

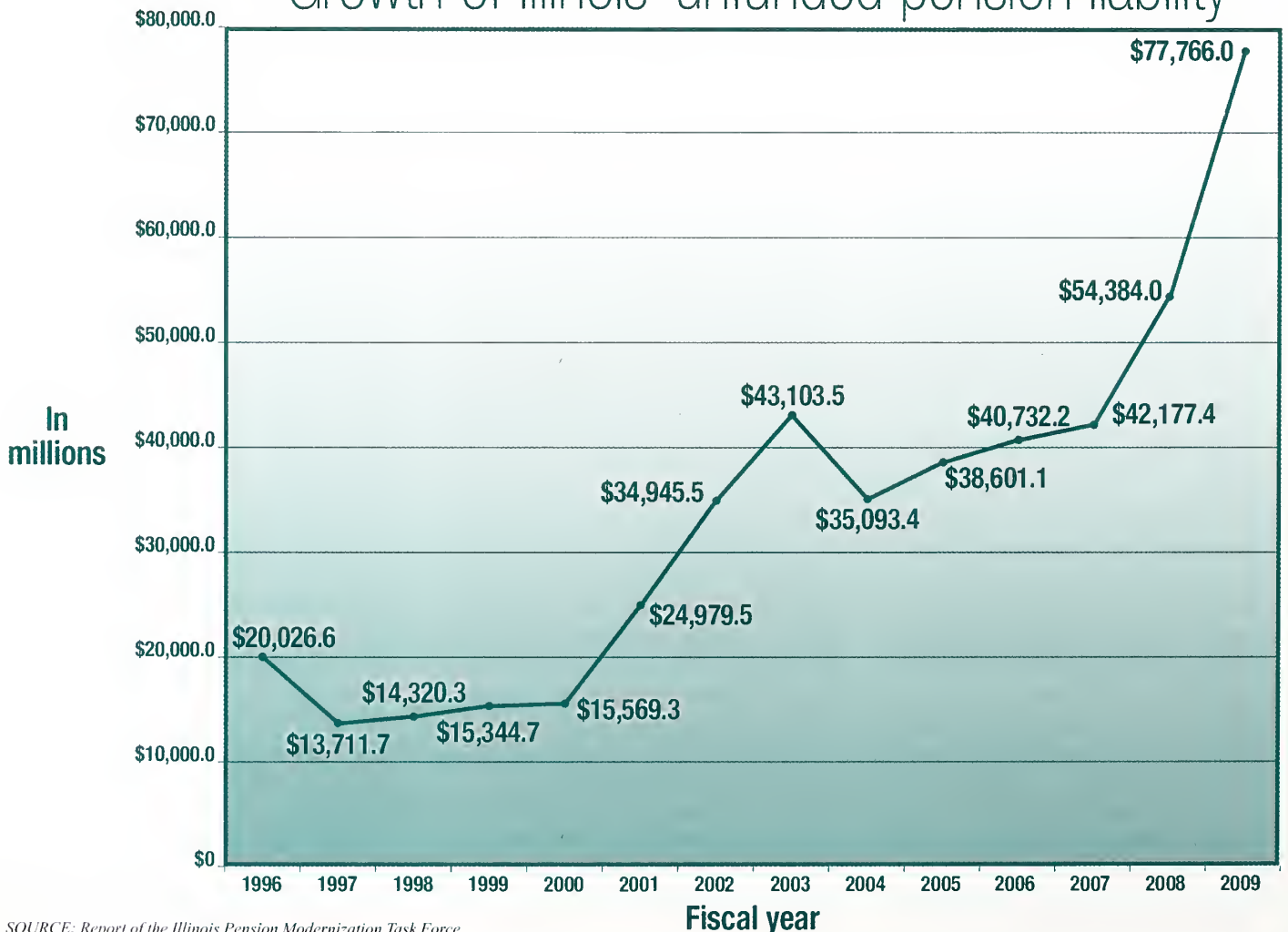
To ensure the state will have the cash needed to meet the new schedule, the

center said the state’s tax structure should be revamped by enacting pending legislation (**HB 174**) that would raise state income tax rates, broaden the sales tax base to include consumer services and increase tax relief to moderate and low-income taxpayers. The measure passed the Senate last May but stalled in the House. Its chances are deemed shaky in an election-year session.

Cut pension benefits? Raise state taxes? Hammer out a compromise with some of each? Perhaps the only sure thing is that the longer lawmakers and the governor wait, the tougher the measures they’ll have to adopt eventually to put the five retirement systems on sound financial footing.

*Charles N. Wheeler III is director of the Public Affairs Reporting program at the University of Illinois Springfield. He is a member of the State Universities Retirement System.*

## Growth of Illinois’ unfunded pension liability



SOURCE: Report of the Illinois Pension Modernization Task Force



# About Rich Miller

His Capitol Fax newsletter came long before blogs and yet includes analysis, opinion and even advice for political types

article and photograph by Kevin McDermott

It's a rainy December evening, and Rich Miller is still keyed up over the day's top story when he arrives at the small, dark bar at Maldaner's Restaurant in downtown Springfield. The founder, publisher, editor and sole reporter for the *Capitol Fax* political newsletter rejects the Jameson's-and-soda that the bartender automatically offers. "Too early," Miller declares — and he orders a Guinness instead.

He's here to talk about himself, but he's more interested in dissecting the story. Gov. Pat Quinn got into it that day with state Comptroller Dan Hynes over Quinn's \$500 million short-term borrowing plan. To the state's mainstream media, it's a straightforward policy disagreement between the two top contenders for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination; to Miller, it's a labyrinth of political intrigue and comedy. The players are referenced by first names, like kids on a playground. The story is augmented with on-the-spot psychoanalysis and the occasional cackling laugh:

"The governor said Alexi [Giannoulas, the state treasurer] is on board and Dan [Hynes, the state comptroller and Quinn's opponent in the Democratic primary] isn't. ... Well, it turns out Alexi wasn't on board. ... Lisa [Madigan, the attorney general] has to sign off, too, but they were dinking her around for two months. ... There's some electoral politics involved. ... There are [community] groups that are supposed to get [part] of this \$500 million. ... They're in big trouble. They needed to



*Rich Miller is the founder, publisher, editor and sole reporter for the Capitol Fax political newsletter. He is pictured in his home office.*

get this done by Christmas, but there's a lot of steps you have to take to sell a bond; it's not like selling something on eBay. ... So the governor kind of freaked out. ... All of a sudden on Monday, everybody was told, 'You have to sign off on this tomorrow.' But they don't have a plan yet. ... There are things you need to provide to the comptroller to get him to sign off on this, but they basically said, 'Sign off and we'll tell you later what we're gonna do.' Who does anything like that, except if your wife tells you to do it?" He cackles.

Chances are, you didn't get most of that in your local newspaper. And unless

you're part of a select cadre of Springfield and Chicago political insiders, chances are you didn't really need it.

"It's not 'newspaper stuff,'" Miller admits. "But my readers care about this."

Miller's readers are the legislators, staffers, lobbyists, reporters and business owners throughout Illinois who pay \$350 a year to subscribe to *Capitol Fax*, the two-to-three page daily faxed newsletter that's unknown in most of the state but ubiquitous in the Statehouse.

How many subscribers there are remains a guarded secret. Miller reveals only that there are fewer than 2,000; his

home on Lake Springfield suggests it's maybe not many fewer. In any case, friends and foes alike acknowledge that the newsletter generally delivers on its mantra of "Political Intelligence."

"In caucus, people will say, 'Let's keep this confidential, I don't want to read this in *Capitol Fax*,' and afterward, sure enough, there's a special edition" revealing what went on in caucus, says state Senate President John Cullerton, a Chicago Democrat. "He's obviously got his sources."

"The guy has an uncanny ability to get people to talk to him," says lobbyist Tom Swaik. "He comes up with things; I don't know where the hell he gets them."

"In my world, he's essential. People read him," says lobbyist Thom Serafin, who admits it "gives me heartburn" when his own clients and issues are topics in the newsletter. Miller, a former door-to-door salesman ("Better journalism training than anything," he insists), started *Capitol Fax* in 1993 with \$7,000 borrowed from his parents.

At the time, the newsletter's mix of information, analysis, opinion and even advice to the state's political leaders was unusual—bordering-on-sacrilegious under the rigid rules of mainstream political journalism. Today, those very media are morphing at the edges into something like *Capitol Fax*, with snarky blogs, real-time insider political analysis and other relatively new offerings.

"I think Rich was probably ahead of the curve," says Don Craven of the Illinois Press Association, "and the curve is catching up with him."

**Miller, 47, was** born in Kankakee and spent his early years on a farm in Iroquois County. His mother was a U.S. Defense Department employee, which led the family to live in Utah and Germany. He later returned to Illinois, attended what was then Sangamon State University in Springfield (now the University of Illinois Springfield), worked construction, did telemarketing, sold knives and fire alarms.

By 1990, Miller was working for Hannah Information Services, which gathered and disseminated legislative information for lobbyists in Springfield. He wrote a series for Hannah that year on the Republicans' inability to make a dent in House Speaker Michael Madigan's Democratic majority.

"It was called, 'What's wrong with Lee Daniels?' [then the GOP House leader]. ... Nobody else was writing about it except me," Miller said. "I'd get warnings almost every day from lobbyists connected to Daniels saying, 'Lay off.' I thought it was a compliment because nobody knew who I was. It made me."

Daniels, now in private life in the Chicago suburbs, still pauses when asked about Miller and his reporting.

"When I was there, many times, he engaged in personal issues. ... I felt he was unfair in some of his criticism," Daniels says. "He's much better than he was in the past. He's much more observant, much more in-depth. ... He is expressing a lot of the frustration that those of us in the general public feel" toward government.

For Miller, the Daniels showdown convinced him there was a market for that kind of ground-level political reporting. In April 1993, he quit Hannah and started *Capitol Fax*. He initially charged \$250 a year, luring customers through direct-mail marketing and sending the daily fax out himself. By October of that year, he had paid back the loan from his parents and bought a house.

As the client base rose, he branched out with an Internet version of his newsletter. He moved to Chicago for a while, commuting to Springfield during legislative sessions.

He cobbled together a group of small newspapers to fund reporting trips to Kosovo (in 1999) and Baghdad (in 2003). During the latter trip, he met his wife, Wasan Azoo Miller, in what he describes as a "wartime romance." She persuaded him to move from Chicago back to Springfield, to a shorter commute and a bigger home.

The house is a spacious, immaculate structure full of collected art, antiques and political paraphernalia. A 30-acre nature preserve borders one side of the property; on the other is Lake Springfield.

There are views everywhere, except from the small, cluttered corner office on the second floor from which *Capitol Fax* is produced on a widescreen Mac monitor. Miller's view is mainly of the William Crook Jr. drawing of the state Capitol that hangs over his desk. "I like it that way. If you've got a view, you get distracted by the damned view."

Miller spends most mornings there in the viewless room, writing the newsletter, monitoring the blog and gathering information. If the legislature is in session, he'll drive to the Capitol by midafternoon and stop by a series of what he calls "watering holes."

"It's like hunting — you know, you go to a watering hole, and you wait for the animals to come to you. You don't go out in the middle of the desert searching for animals." The watering holes include the brass rail outside the House and Senate chambers, certain hallways, certain lawmakers' offices, "the little nooks and crannies of the Capitol." And, later, the bars.

"I try to keep it to one drink to two of theirs. If I can keep my one-to-two ratio going, you never know what kind of stuff you can hear."

Critics on both the left and right have accused Miller of ideological bias over the years. What a careful reading of *Capitol Fax* mostly reveals is a balanced contempt for all sides of the spectrum.

On legislative Democrats: "[They] seem so concerned with doing nothing that might endanger their grip on power ... that they've failed to notice that their failure to do anything at all is endangering their existence as a majority party."

On Republican primary candidates: "'Tea party fever' has firmly grasped [them] by the throat these days. ... They're so fearful of being attacked from the right that they're in danger of making themselves unelectable when the rest of the electorate enters the picture."

On Quinn's handling of the \$500 million borrowing plan: "[His] office has been needlessly secretive and grossly incompetent during this entire process. ... Heck, Rod Blagojevich was able to get a short-term borrowing plan approved ... after he was arrested by the FBI."

On GOP gubernatorial front-runner Jim Ryan, whose campaign mistakenly claimed an endorsement it didn't actually get: "[He] apparently has no resources to hire a decent researcher."

"[Miller] is not an ideologue for any cause," suggests lobbyist Todd Vandermyde. "He just has no patience for stupidity in government."

In addition to freewheeling analysis, Miller is known for his forays into psychoanalysis. The personalities, perceived insecurities and gleaned motives of newsmak-



ers routinely wind up in *Capitol Fax* right alongside factual accounts of their actions. Michael Madigan in particular has been on Miller's couch for years.

"The 'why' is really important," Miller insists. "Some of these guys get pretty predictable. Rod [Blagojevich] got predictable. It's like, 'threc, two, one, boom! Yep, I knew that was coming.' (Cackling laugh.) ... He was crazy. God, he was fun to cover. It was like watching a perpetual train wreck."

**There are two** questions that everyone who spends much time in the Statehouse eventually wonders about: What is Mike Madigan thinking? And how much does Rich Miller make?

Admit it, you've done the math. Three-hundred-fifty dollars a year per subscription. Legions of potential subscribers — lawmakers, lobbyists, journalists, special interest groups from Rockford to Cairo. Overhead expenses which, it's tempting to imagine, encompass not much more than a fax machine and a bar stool.

The math isn't actually that simple. The blog that Miller produces now in conjunction with the newsletter has turned the "fax" into an increasingly high-tech operation. He steadfastly refuses to talk dollars or even numbers of subscribers, except to say it's "not as many as most people think."

"If I had 2,000 subscribers ... I'd make \$700,000 a year," he notes. "If I made \$700,000 a year, I'd live in a better house than this."

What shows up on the state comptroller's contract database alone — presumably a sliver of the whole — has totaled between \$20,000 and \$26,000 a year, for each of the past five years, in subscription

fees from the General Assembly, the governor's office, the state Supreme Court and other agencies and offices throughout state government. State campaign records show that political candidates, parties and PACs have kicked in an additional \$175,000 over the past decade in subscriptions.

That's not to mention business from potentially hundreds of other sources that wouldn't show up on either of those lists: "You got the big corporations — all the big corporations subscribe — all the major unions, all the congressional districts, municipalities, townships, counties, school districts," says Miller.

And that's in addition to mainstream media subscribers, who tend to see him as either a visionary in their industry, or a pretender, or sometimes both.

"He does it in a manner that is sometimes entertaining, sometimes informative, sometimes aggravating," says Craven, of the Illinois Press Association. "Should community newspapers try to match the way [Miller] does business? No. Can we learn something from it? Yes."

In fact, Statehouse reporters from newspapers all over Illinois now routinely mix news, analysis and in some cases out-and-out opinion in the blog posts that augment most papers' government coverage these days. To credit (or blame) Miller for that universal trend would be ridiculous, of course. But there's no disputing he was doing it years before the rest of them. The name of his company — "Ahead of Our Time Publishing" — now seems prescient.

"I'm always a little cautious of him," says Senate Republican leader Christine

Radogno, who learned the hard way about the rules (or lack of them) under what she sees as "a new type of journalism" embodied by Miller.

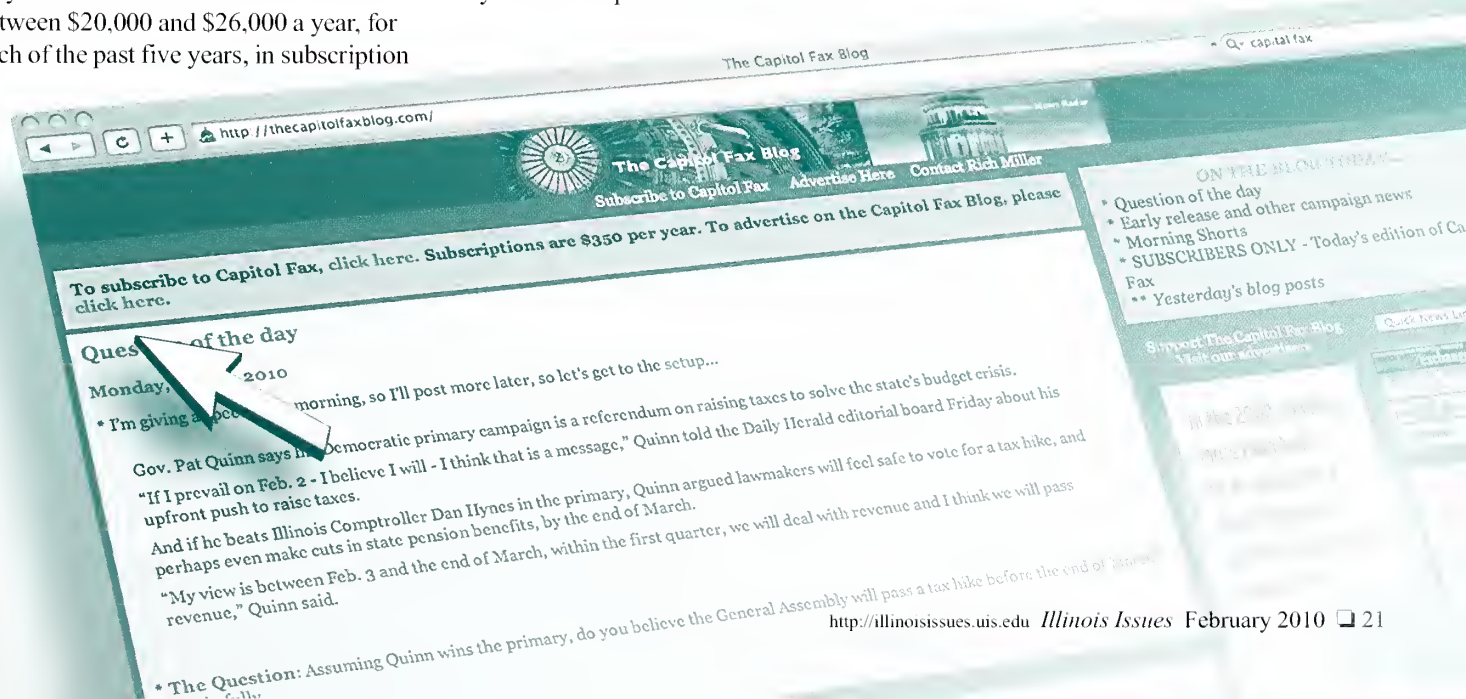
Radogno was challenging an incumbent state senator in her first Republican primary when Miller called her at home to ask her about the race. She was at her stove and spoke too freely. "I said some fairly unflattering stuff" about her opponent, she recalls, laughing about it now. "I was used to the news media kind of screening what I'd say, cleaning it up ... [but] it was in *Capitol Fax* the next day, verbatim."

To Miller's fans, that kind of no-holds-barred, total-immersion reporting is what makes *Capitol Fax* urgent reading. "He's different from you others in the mainstream media," says Vandermyde, the lobbyist. "He actually spends time mixing and mingling with the politicians. He doesn't just come in for the issue du jour."

As the mainstream media edge into Miller's turf with analytical blogs, Miller is edging into theirs, with a regular column in the *Chicago Sun-Times* and a syndicated version of *Capitol Fax* in scores of smaller papers. Meanwhile, he's expanding his online operations, focusing more on video.

"I know my subscribers. They want one 'spit-take' a day. You've got to give them one of those where they're drinking their coffee, and they spit it out all over the fax. It's like, 'Where the f--- did that come from?'" he says. "They're all junkies, man. That's why they do this — they're political junkies." □

Kevin McDermott is the Springfield bureau chief for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*.



# Illinois' Muslims

The population of Islam followers here has grown substantially

article and photographs by Susan Hogan/Albach

In the darkened suburban Chicago theater, all eyes rested on a 34-year-old American Muslim storyteller with a Midwest accent. For the next hour, Arif Choudhury told poignant stories about growing up in a white American neighborhood with his Bangladeshi parents.

"As a kid, I thought all the Muslims in the world were like me — short, skinny and brown," said Choudhury, a Chicago native. Then one day, his dad took him to a nearby mosque, where everyone was white. "I told him we were in the wrong building," Choudhury said, which garnered chuckles from the audience. "He told me about Eastern European Muslims."

Choudhury grew up in Illinois in the 1970s and 1980s, a time when Muslims weren't so visible across the landscape. Like many young Muslims living in the state today, he straddled two worlds — his parents' native culture and that of his own.

"I ate McDonald's food with my American friends and lentils with my Muslim friends," he said. During Ramadan, the month when Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset, he rose before dawn and "downed a lot of Coke and Totino's pizza."

Illinois Muslims have come a long way since then. More than 90 mosques and Islamic centers now exist. Schools, professional organizations, civil rights groups — even Muslim summer camps — are now woven into the state's culture.

Today, more than 400,000 Muslims live in Illinois, as compared with about 50,000 in the 1970s, according to the *Chicago Tribune*. Their leaders include well-educated physicians, lawyers and religious leaders — a few who've become superstars on the national and international scene — with the U.S. president, pope and the Dalai Lama in their spheres of influence.

Among those prominent Muslims is Eboo Patel, founder of Chicago's Interfaith Youth Core, which promotes interfaith cooperation. He writes a religion column for the *Washington Post* and serves on President Barack Obama's advisory council on faith-based and neighborhood partnerships.

"American Muslims want to be part of the solution to the problems Americans are having with Muslims around the

world," says Abdul Malik Mujahid, the newly elected board chairman of the Chicago-based Parliament of the World's Religions. He's the first Muslim to hold the position.

"Muslims in Illinois have learned the importance of getting involved in all aspects of society at the grassroots level," says Mujahid, president of Sound Vision and executive producer of Radio Islam, both in Bridgeview.

Downstate, where there are fewer Muslims, the story is different. In smaller cities, resources are fewer. In rural areas, Muslims are almost nonexistent.

"In Chicago, the large Muslim population has the liberty to form a lot of different mosques," says Imad Rahman, a leader at the Central Illinois Mosque and Islamic Center in Urbana. Those tend to be organized along racial and ethnic lines.

"You'll see a mosque that's predominantly Arab or Bosnian or Indian and Pakistani," Rahman says. "We're not going to have that in Champaign-Urbana. Our population is smaller, so it forces a diverse demography within the mosque."

That diversity sometimes leads to clashes over whether specific practices are cultural or religious. For instance, during gatherings at the mosque, how much interaction should be allowed between genders?

"The Arabs are mostly separatists, but those of us from India mix freely," says Matiur Rahman, a retired chemist from India. Even so, he says, the rules are more relaxed at the center than a decade ago.

"Times have changed," says Rahman, who isn't related to Imad Rahman. "There are meetings now where men are sitting on one side of a table and women on the other, and there's no separation."

For teens such as Sumaiya Mohammed, 19, who grew up in Palatine and attended public schools, following the strict gender rules set down by her Indian parents has been hard because other American teens don't live that way.

"In high school, I never went to dances or the prom," says Mohammed, a petite community college student whose face is framed by a large scarf.



"I wanted to go with friends, but my parents wouldn't allow it," she says. "There's no dating. I'm not even supposed to be seen publicly talking with a boy. Sometimes you feel left out. But then you see kids getting in trouble, and you start to appreciate the rules."

**On a recent** Friday afternoon, men and women filed into the Urbana mosque across from the University of Illinois for what is traditionally the biggest gathering of the week. They kicked off their shoes before filing into a big room with no chairs.

The men lined up shoulder to shoulder in long rows at the front half of the room. The women sat on the floor behind them. At other mosques, they might sit in a loft overlooking the men.

"It's about modesty," explains Fatemah Hermes, a student who greets visitors with a wide smile. "When we pray, we do a lot of kneeling and bending over. That's not the most flattering position for a woman. We'd rather not have the men behind us."

Behind a lectern at one end of the room is a casually dressed man wearing a dark vest. The leader of Friday prayer is always a man here — a practice typical in mosques around the world. For 20 minutes, he talks to the crowd about gratitude.

"The most valuable thing to us who come pray here is our belief in Allah," he tells the people who fill the room and spill into the hallways. "Let us be thankful for what we have. Let our gratitude drive us to help others in need."

Before 9/11, Illinois' Muslims focused inward, they say. Many had come to the state from other countries around the world and feared cultural and religious assimilation.

And with good reason, according to Mohammad Siddiqi, the interim chair of the English and Journalism Department at Western Illinois University in Macomb.

"There were no mosques and only one grocery store that provided halal meat when I came to Chicago," says Siddiqi, a native of India who came to the United States in 1981. "The issues in the community were internal. Parents were deeply concerned about establishing schools to teach Islam to their children."

Because Muslims who settled in Illinois tended to be well-educated and affluent, they had the means to carry out their vision. Illinois Muslims include a high number of doctors and lawyers — women as well as men.

"We were living in our own affluent bubble and not caring a whole lot about what was going on outside of the bubble," Imad Rahman says. "We thought being good Muslims was spending all of our time with Muslims."

The terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, changed everything.

"Not a day since then have American Muslims been free of the suspicion that they might be terrorists," says Imran Khan, a 19-year-old Muslim convert from Mount Prospect. "I was 9 years old when the attacks happened. Yet, I constantly deal with guys calling me 'terrorist' just because I'm a Muslim."

A few days after Khan uttered those words, a Muslim man from Nigeria was arrested for trying to blow up an airplane over Detroit. The man, a passenger on the plane, was carrying explosives in his underwear.

Last year, a poll taken by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life showed that a third of Americans believe that Islam is more likely than other religions to encourage violence.



*Fatemah Hermes, 27, is working on a doctorate in microbiology at the University of Illinois.*



*Friday juup prayer at the Central Illinois Mosque and Islamic Center*



*Women sit by themselves during Friday juup prayer at the Central Illinois Mosque and Islamic Center.*

The stigma is worse in Illinois, some Muslims believe, because of high profile terrorism charges against people with ties in the state:

- In September, the FBI announced the arrest of Michael C. Finton, an American using the name Talib Islam, for allegedly trying to blow up a federal courthouse in Springfield. Finton, 29, prayed at a Decatur mosque.
- Five of the seven Muslim men arrested in 2006 were convicted of trying to blow up Chicago's Sears Tower, now known as the Willis Tower.
- Another Muslim convert was accused of trying to blow up garbage cans at a shopping center during Christmas season.

In addition, after the maximum-security prison in Thomson soared to the top of President Barack Obama's sites to move Guantanamo Bay prisoners, U.S. Rep. Donald Manzullo, a Republican from Egan, told a Rockford television station the terrorists were "driven by some savage religion."

"We say over and over that Islam is a peaceful religion," says Mujahid, a past president of the Council of Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicago. "Terrorists who do violence in the name of Islam are misguided. They distort what we stand for and believe."

When a dozen soldiers were fatally shot by a military psychiatrist at Fort Hood in Texas in November, several Illinois Muslims say they prayed: "Please don't be Muslim. Please don't be Muslim."

The accused shooter was a Virginia native who self-identified as Muslim. Islamic organizations across Illinois were quick to send out news releases condemning the violence.

Even so, after the shootings, a Chicago area Muslim says she was verbally assaulted and her head covering pulled off at a grocery market by another shopper who was angry about what happened at Fort Hood.

"Every time someone commits violence in the name of Islam, Muslims living here experience backlash," says Hasan Shahid, 24, a graduate student at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign in Latin American studies.

During the last presidential election, Obama garnered overwhelming support from U.S. Muslims. More than 90 percent voted Democratic, according to the Gallup Center for Muslim Studies.

But a few decades ago, they were solidly in the Republican camp, drawn by conservatives' opposition to gay marriage and abortion.

September 11 proved to be a political turning point for Muslims, Siddiqi says.

"It was a wake-up call that we needed to do more to integrate ourselves more fully into the mainstream of American society," Siddiqi says. "We had been so inwardly focused that we weren't prepared for the suspicion that followed the attacks."

When the administration of President George W. Bush launched its so-called war on terrorism, American Muslims at home felt under attack. Their charities were accused of funneling money to terrorists; they faced wire tapping and other intrusive surveillance, as well as immigration delays.

The rhetoric of some Republican politicians and religious leaders further alienated U.S. Muslims. Franklin Graham, son of respected evangelist Billy Graham, described Islam as a "very evil and wicked religion."



"What we learned after 9/11 is that it might not be in our best interests to be tied to the Republican Party," Rahman says. "A lot of Muslims feared they would lose their freedom to practice their religion because of the rhetoric."

But not all Republicans were insensitive. A few months ago, 88-year-old Paul Findley, a former 11-term Republican congressman from central Illinois, spoke out against the religious bigotry at a Muslim gathering in San Antonio.

"You have a duty to defend Islam from false rumors," newspapers reported he said. "If not for yourself, do it for your children, your neighbors. Do it for America. Do it for Islam. And never give up."

Since Obama's election, however, some Muslims have grown disenchanted. The president traveled to Turkey and Egypt to meet with Muslims there but appears to keep Mus-

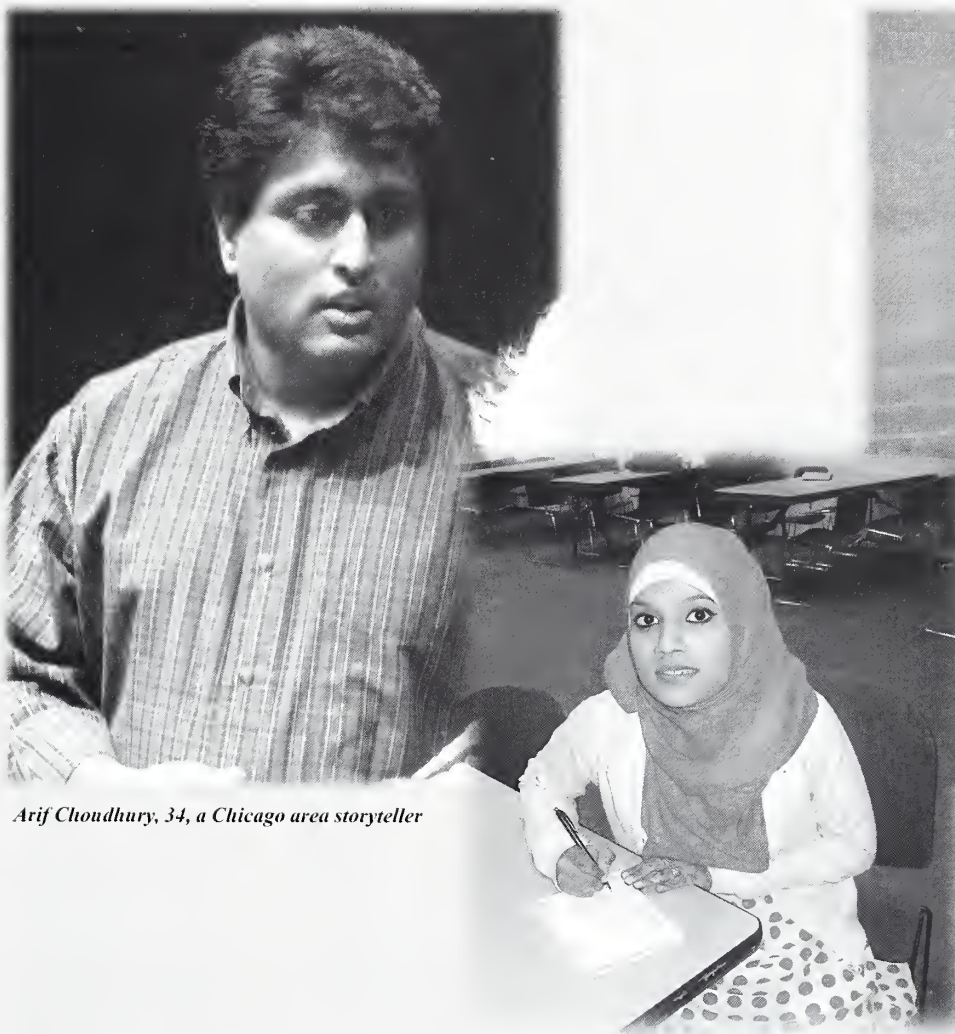
lims on American soil at bay. They fear he sees them as an image problem, in part, because of inaccurate claims during the campaign that he was secretly a Muslim.

"American Muslims don't want to be shut out," Mujahid says. "That adds to the stigma we've faced since 9/11."

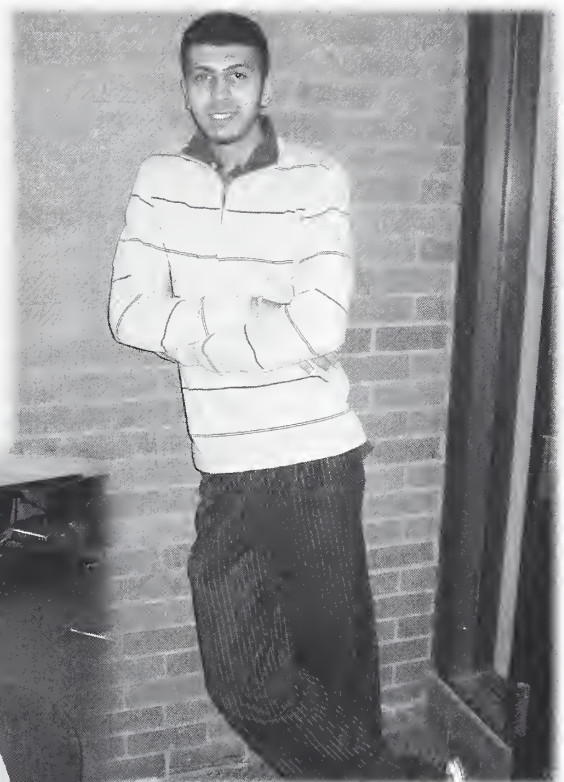
Siddiqi says that many non-Muslim Americans have been unwavering in their support. In fact, three days after 9/11, more than 600 people turned out in his community to dedicate a new mosque.

"Muslims were going to cancel the event after what happened," he says. "But the mayor, police chief and townspeople encouraged us to go ahead. Hundreds of people showed up to welcome us and tell us that they were glad we've made a home here." □

*Susan Hogan/Albach is a Park Ridge-based free-lance writer.*



*Arif Choudhury, 34, a Chicago area storyteller*



*Iuran Khau, 19, of Mount Prospect*

*Snuaiya Mohammed, 19, of Palatine*



# The rise of science politics

Nearly all of the nation's major problems have science-based solutions, and politicians have moved from ideology to facts for policymaking

by Beverley Scobell



“Art is science made clear,” said the French artist Jean Cocteau.

The public needs that. Science is complicated, detailed and that thing the “smart kids” in high school do. It uses terms like biotechnology and nanotechnology that people sort of know and other terms like phagocytes and quarks that most have little idea what they are.

Yet people only have to visit a hospital, choose an app on their iPhones or go grocery shopping to understand that the work scientists do returns to them in countless ways. And scientists need the public to support government grants, the foundation of their funding, to continue to make discoveries.

Today, that is particularly important to policymakers, who have a mandate from a new administration to spend taxpayer dollars to make citizens healthier, wealthier and safer, based on what scientists know. For most of the last decade, many science policy decisions were based on ideology rather than fact. President Barack Obama promised in his campaign to reverse that trend, and many scientists agree he has made progress in his first year in office.

Nearly every one of the problems the nation is grappling with — health care, energy, the economy, climate change, national defense — have solutions based in science. Yet, just 8 percent of the members of Congress had careers in science, according to the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Subtract doctors and engineers, and the number



drops to less than 2 percent, seven of 435, who have a working background in the applied sciences: three physicists, two biologists, a chemist and an environmental scientist.

“That leaves most members of Congress looking to lobbyists or the Internet for answers,” says Shawn Otto, co-founder of Science Debate 2008, an organization formed to try to get the presidential candidates to debate science-based issues.

Scientists joined the movement to be more politically active in the last election after seeing federal funding for nonmilitary research steadily decrease under the administration of President George W. Bush. Signing on were more than 38,000 scientists and engineers, including 30 Nobel laureates, and nearly every major science organization, representing 125 million members.

One of the signers was Rep. Bill Foster, Democrat of Geneva and former physicist at Fermilab in Batavia. He says that science funding under Bush moved more toward “very short-term, very applied research and engineering.” The tension in science funding, he says, comes from debate about whether to support research that “will turn the world upside down” and have applications 50 years from now or fund projects that will make money in one, two or five years.

“One of the struggles in politics is that all politicians are focused on the next election, so they’re looking for things that pay out in two years and get votes,” says Foster. “Whereas the really high payoff discoveries, or the benefits from them, have been 20, 30 or 50 years [out].” The result, he says, is that Congress underinvests in areas like education and basic scientific research that has long-term benefits for the nation.

However, Foster says last year Congress sent “a very strong signal” with the passage of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, commonly called the stimulus bill or ARRA, with \$21.5 billion for research and development. “A healthy fraction of that was devoted to both applied new research — mainly energy, new forms of energy — but also a significant increase in long-term basic research.”

Congress launched a new initiative in mid-November to highlight the scientific



An “ultrasonic fountain” sprays microdroplets into the air when ultrasound passes up through a liquid and hits the surface. This is what happens in an ultrasonic home humidifier.

research and related activities made possible by ARRA. The Web site, [www.scienceworksforus.org](http://www.scienceworksforus.org), reports on research being conducted in all 50 states. One story tells of the \$8 million grant the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago will use to improve the performance and reliability of wind turbines.

The six largest universities and two federal labs in the state have reported funds coming from the stimulus — an incomplete list as of January— for more than 649 grants worth more than \$570.5 million, according to the federal Web site. The University of Illinois has been awarded more than \$130 million of that for its three campuses over a span of several years, which is true for all ARRA-sponsored projects. The University of Chicago and Northwestern University, both private, received \$73.8 million and

\$92 million, respectively, for research.

Argonne and Fermilab, located in suburban Chicago, were scheduled to cut staff and shut down projects in the waning days of the Bush administration. Under the stimulus, Argonne anticipates it will receive close to \$200 million, and Fermi has received \$103.1 million to continue research.

Illinois is home to one of the world’s largest concentrations of education and research facilities, including the University of Illinois’ National Center for Supercomputing Applications, the University of Chicago’s Fermi and Frank Institutes, Northwestern University’s International Institute for Nanotechnology, Argonne’s Advanced Photon Source and Fermilab’s Tevatron, as well as a number of medical centers making cutting-edge discoveries.

"Illinois is a major research fulcrum," says Henry Bienen, president emeritus of Northwestern University. "Whether it's been exploited well, spawning new companies, is very doubtful."

Bienen says there is not enough state support, particularly in the area of matching federal funds. Researchers are making discoveries, but not enough good ideas are turned into products that translate to an increase in jobs.

Foster says the federal government is beginning to pick up the slack, but it is a struggle to get commercial interests to do their part to support long-term basic research. He points to Bell Labs in Murray Hill, N.J., as one of the few exceptions. "We're still collecting Nobel Prizes from Bell Labs," he says. "They invented the transistor; they invented the laser." Add to that cellular telephone technology, solar cells and communications satellites.

One place the government might help is with patent protection. Because it only lasted 17 years (20 years since 1995), Foster says Bell no longer receives compensation from the "hundreds of billions

of dollars of economic gain" realized just from the transistor and laser.

In Illinois, Bienen says he realizes the state is in a "tough budget time, but you have to have some kind of fund to help start-up companies." Biotechnology and nanotechnology offer great promise for creating new businesses in Illinois.

As an example of the type of discoveries being made in Illinois, Bienen says a Northwestern professor of chemistry, Richard Silverman, invented a compound that Pfizer markets as the drug Lyrica®, which has annual sales worldwide amounting to about \$2.6 billion. It is approved for the treatment of epilepsy, neuropathic pain and fibromyalgia, and outside the United States it is also prescribed for generalized anxiety disorder.

Still, Illinois does support science in a significant way through the geological, natural history and water surveys based at its flagship university. Last year, the surveys and the Illinois Sustainable Technology Center were combined by the General Assembly under the umbrella of the newly created Institute

of Natural Resource Sustainability at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. An annual budget of about \$56 million supports 600 employees, primarily scientists. Most of the funding comes from grant and contracts, about \$40 million, and the rest from state appropriation.

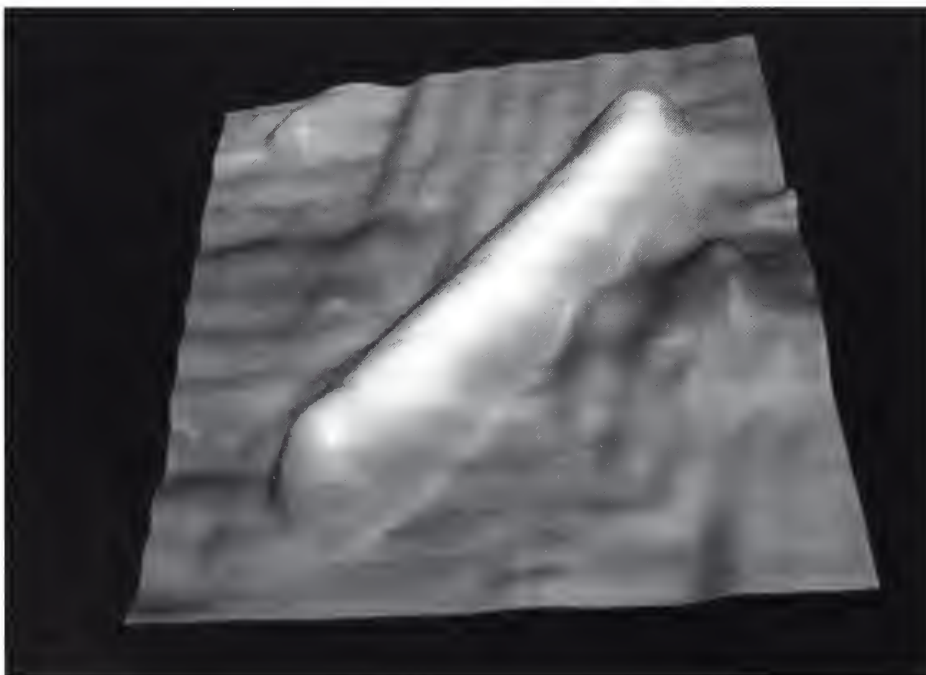
In their long history reaching back to 1851, the surveys have gained an international reputation for solving problems using cutting-edge science and technology. The Illinois State Geological Survey provided research that supported the successful bid to site FutureGen, the coal gasification-carbon sequestration project, in Mattoon. The U.S. Department of Energy has not given the go-ahead, but the prospect improved with the election of President Obama.

The Illinois Natural History Survey can trace its roots to Stephen Forbes, who is credited with developing the field of ecology, and was at the forefront of using science to gain public support for the environmental movement. Much of state environmental and natural resource policy is based on survey field studies of Illinois' plants and animals.

The Illinois State Water Survey tracks the state's water supplies and was a pioneer in weather technology. In 1948, it was the first research institution to use weather radar and apply it to detecting a tornado. In 1968, it designed and developed the nation's first Doppler weather radar, leading to a network of stations across the country that provide an early warning of approaching dangerous storms. Recently, two water survey scientists, Stanley Changnon and Ken Kunkel, shared the 2008 Nobel Prize with other scientists as part of the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change.

The Sustainable Technology Center, created in 1984, is working on ways to turn algae into biofuel. It developed techniques for moving bargeloads of sediment clogging the Illinois River at Peoria and taking it upstream to a former steel mill in Chicago, turning slag piles into restorative parks. Ongoing research looks at the ecological effects of contaminants in Great Lakes fish and of pharmaceuticals and personal care products in the state's rivers and streams, which could cause problems in reproductive health.

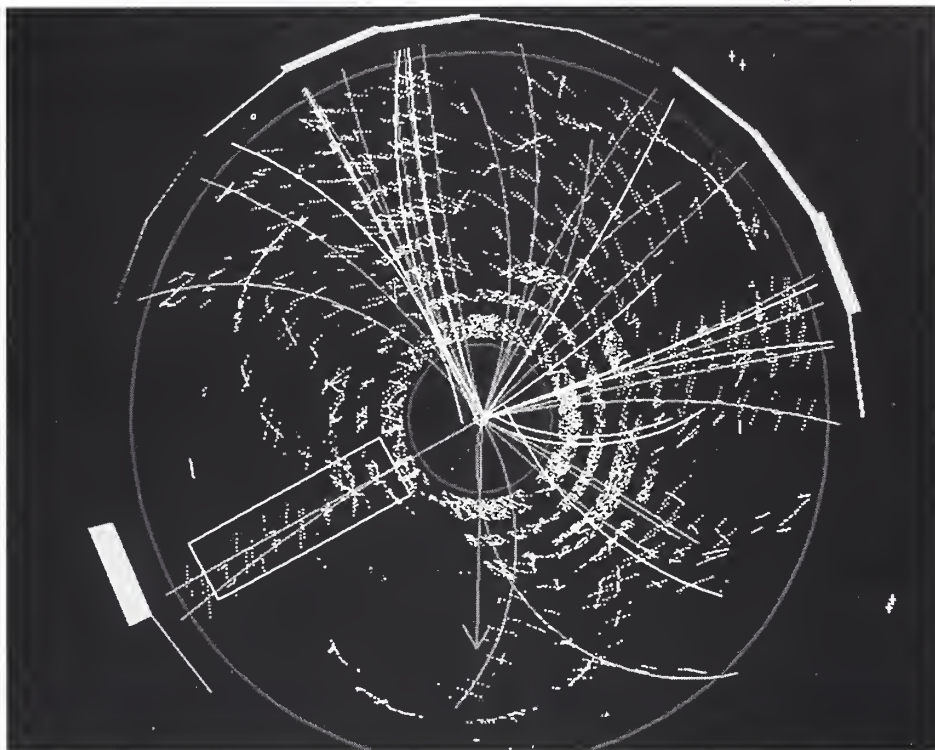
*Photograph courtesy of Martin Gruebele and Joseph Lyding, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign*



*This micrograph of a carbon nanotube on a silicon surface is approximately 1/50,000 the width of a human hair. On the silicon surface are rows of so-called dimers, which are silicon atoms bound by two hydrogen atoms each. The bump is the carbon nanotube. By setting the laser to a color so that only the nanotube absorbs light, scientists can detect the absorption of light down to a single molecule on the silicon surface. Knowledge about the characteristics of nanotubes, which exhibit extraordinary strength, unique electrical properties and thermal conductivity, could lead to smaller, faster computers. Carbon nanotube chips are expected to be more than 1,000 times smaller than current computer chips and would use much less electricity.*



***As an example of the type of discoveries being made in Illinois, a Northwestern professor of chemistry, Richard Silverman, invented a compound that Pfizer markets as the drug Lyrica®, which has annual sales worldwide amounting to about \$2.6 billion. It is approved for the treatment of epilepsy, neuropathic pain and fibromyalgia, and outside the United States it is also prescribed for generalized anxiety disorder.***



*This is a computer drawn image of a collision of subatomic particles including the top quark, the heaviest known form of matter. This image was created by computer software written in 1989 by U.S. Rep. Bill Foster, a member of the team that made the discovery at Fermilab. The discovery of the top quark was officially announced on March 2, 1995.*

Funding for one state program aimed at spurring scientific research on issues facing food and agricultural products was cut. Budget constraints for fiscal year 2010 eliminated funding for the Council for Agricultural Research, C-FAR, a non-profit organization through which the General Assembly appropriated funds to address issues facing agribusiness.

An October U.S. Department of Agriculture report ranks Illinois at 25th among states for investment in food and agricultural research, down for the fifth consecutive year. That is not the case in other states, even in the current recession. In 2008, 40 states increased investments in food and agricultural research, including several of Illinois' Midwestern neighbors. For example, while Missouri added 66 percent and Indiana 51 percent, Illinois' support for ag research decreased 18 percent.

Cutting funds to C-FAR was a short-sighted decision, says Rep. Naomi Jakobsson, Democrat of Urbana. "The food and agricultural research done is vitally important, not just to Illinois, but eventually everybody benefits from their discoveries."

Indeed, the USDA signaled agreement in October by awarding the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign a \$660,000 grant, based on a C-FAR research initiative that focused on water quality nutrient standards. Mark David, professor of biogeochemistry at UIUC and principal investigator of the research, said in an announcement: "The C-FAR nutrient standards research and earlier C-FAR water quality studies allowed us to put forth a very formidable USDA proposal."

With Illinois cutting back in order to pay its bills, scientists are thankful for support from the federal government. And that support is backed by a majority of Americans. The Science Debate 2008 organization commissioned Harris Interactive® to conduct a poll asking, among other topics, whether scientific research is important. Otto, the leader of the group, says 84 percent of respondents agree that scientific innovations are improving our standard of living.

A July poll by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press found essentially the same answer. The same majority, 84 percent, said science has had a positive effect on society and that science has

made life easier for most people. Most also say that government investments in science, as well as engineering and technology, pay off in the long run.

According to Chris Mooney, who along with Otto and others founded Science Debate and is author of *Unscientific America*, science stories rarely make the news and most media outlets have cut their science departments and fired their science journalists. However, despite the lack of attention from mainstream media, most Americans understand that progress and prosperity are born of discovery.

Policymakers are again responding to that message from the public. Foster says he is encouraged by the increase in long-term thinking by politicians. More of his colleagues, he says, are seeing their job as doing what's right for the country 10, 20 and 30 years from now.

"And when they think that way, then they vote that way," says Foster. "They naturally devote a greater amount of resources into things like education, things like medical care for children and things like basic scientific research where the payoff comes not in the next election but decades from now." □

# Prisoner count

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Should U.S. Census tabulations include those incarcerated in the community?  
Voting rights activists are among those who don't think so

by Jessica Pupovac

When the U.S. Census Bureau launches its decennial push to count every man, woman and child in the United States this spring, more than 50,000 prisoners throughout Illinois will be counted at their prison addresses, in communities where they are unlikely to ever cast a ballot, send a child to school or access social services.

It is a practice as old as the Census Bureau itself and, according to one official, one the bureau is well aware of. But a growing movement of voting rights activists, prison reformers and Illinois legislators are calling the practice, particularly as it relates to legislative maps, "prison gerrymandering" and they are pushing for change — if not at the federal level, then here in Illinois.

"It's a double incentive to have a prison in your community," says Paula Wolff, senior executive at Chicago Metropolis 2020, a Chicago-based civic group that works on criminal justice reform, "because there are a lot of people getting counted in your population

whose constituent needs you don't have to attend to and who only benefit your community because they are being locked up. You don't have to meet any of their human or policy or personal needs, and that's what, theoretically, if you are a representative elected in a democracy, what you do: You represent those people and what is best for those people in policy matters."

State Rep. LaShawn Ford, a Chicago Democrat, introduced **House Bill 4650**, which would require the Illinois Department of Corrections and every local jail in the state to report their inmates' home addresses to the Illinois secretary of state. That office would then amend the state's official population tally before 2011, when the state legislative map is slated to be redrawn. Ford says his bill would correct an imbalance that is inflating political representation in areas that house prisoners while shrinking political power in high-crime areas, thereby "offend[ing] the principle of one person one vote."

"It erodes minority influence in government," he told *Illinois Issues*. "You have to have good representation for all people in government. That's why it's there. And if you don't have everyone represented, then it's not a good representative government."

But legislators whose home districts house large prisons aren't too keen on Ford's plan.

State Rep. John Cavaletto, a Republican from downstate Salem whose district population currently includes about 3,500 prisoners, thinks the census count should stay on the books as is.

"I don't support [**HB 4650**] at all, and I'm sure other people down here would feel the same way about it," he says. "Members of communities I represent put themselves in harm's way every day guarding Illinois' most dangerous criminals. If human resources from our communities are being used to operate correctional facilities, then the inmates should be counted where they are incarcerated."





*Big Muddy River Correctional Center*

*Photograph courtesy of the Illinois Department of Corrections*

But according to Peter Wagner, executive director of the Prison Policy Initiative, a Massachusetts-based research and advocacy organization that has looked extensively into the effects of counting prisoners at their place of incarceration: “This is not how our government works. His constituents have hard jobs, but you don’t get extra representation for that. The Constitution says we have to base districts on population, not industries.”

The Prison Policy Initiative gave *Illinois Issues* exclusive access to a forthcoming report on how prison counts affect political partitioning in Illinois, titled, “Importing Constituents: Prisoners and Political Clout in Illinois.” According to the report, no Illinois legislative district derives more than 3.4 percent of its population from its prisons. Some of the districts with the largest inmate populations are: District 91, represented by Rep. Michael Smith of Canton, with 3,576 inmates; District 107, represented by Cavaletto, with 3,495 and District 118, represented by Rep. Brandon Phelps of Harrisburg, with 3,261. Senate districts with the largest prison populations include District 58, represented by Sen. David Luechtefeld of Okawville and District 49, represented by Sen. Deanna Demuzio of Carlinville.

Phelps and Smith did not return calls for comment for this article. Luechtefeld and Demuzio say that on principle, they

would support counting prisoners at their home addresses for purposes of redistricting. To Demuzio, however, the devil is in the details.

“We’re looking at a \$13 billion hole today, and it’s pretty costly, when you go in, if you have to hire somebody to go into the facility. You assume that the records are complete, but they may not be. You have to look at scheduling someone to go in and look at those records. I don’t know if that is what we want to get into. You would have to have personnel from IDOC to be there. And looking at the number of facilities we have here, there would have to be a lot of clearance to go in. And you would not have it completed in one day, and what would be the length of time it would take? I don’t think this is something we need to do right now,” she says.

On the local level, at least seven counties in Illinois — Logan, Christian, LaSalle, Livingston, Crawford, Fulton and Knox — have taken it upon themselves to tweak their population figures so that prison populations simply aren’t included in city and county districting. There are still several counties in the state, however, where district sizes are wildly different as a result of those figures. According to the Prison Policy Initiative report, Lee County, which has four districts of about 9,000 people each, has one district where the prison population accounts for almost 25 percent of the population because of the

presence of Dixon Correctional Center. As a result, 75 voters in this district have the same voting power as 100 voters in the other districts.

But, according to public officials in Lee County, it has never been much of an issue. County Clerk and Recorder Nancy Nelson says that prior to a call from *Illinois Issues*, she was unaware of the problem.

“Nobody has ever brought it to my attention in my 10 years here,” says Nelson. “Most of them probably don’t even know.”

Larry Eisenberg, a Lee County commissioner, says local politics rarely get so heated that the additional representation makes much of a difference. However, he added, sometimes there is a city dwellers vs. farmers split on zoning issues, but for the most part, county board meetings are pretty subdued.

“We don’t have any squabbles, we’re pretty happy with the way things are,” he says. “But farmers basically run the show. [District] 4 has more farmers than anybody else.”

Things get a little dicier in Springfield.

The Prison Policy Initiative study found the legislative benefits of prison populations to flow largely away from Chicago and toward the more rural — and white — communities downstate. Although 41 percent of Illinois inmates are from Cook County, a whopping 90 percent of them are incarcerated down-





*Centralia Correctional Center*

*Photograph courtesy of the Illinois Department of Corrections*

state. And although the incarceration rate for African-Americans in Illinois is about 7.5 times higher than whites, 95 percent of the state and federal prison cells are located in disproportionately white counties. In fact, Wagner's research shows, in 20 Illinois counties, more than half of the black population reported in the census as local residents are in fact incarcerated people from elsewhere in the state.

It's one reason the issue is on the radar of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, which advocates for voting rights for minorities.

"You have a class of citizens in this country that have no representation — no political representation — and they are predominantly minority," says Jenigh Garrett, assistant counsel at the fund. "The question is really rooted in a bigger idea that we have in our Constitution of participation in our democracy. We have decided that we will have representation. In order to have responsiveness in government, you have to have a political voice, and if you don't have a political voice or if that political voice is distorted, then you don't have a role in government."

The African-American subcommittee of the Census Bureau's Race and Ethnicity Advisory Committee has also recom-

mended more than once that the bureau change the way it counts prisoners.

But a spokesperson with the bureau says that while census officials are aware of the issues, they have no plans to modify the policy in the near future.

"We've been doing that the same way since 1790. Basically, we count prisoners the way we count everyone else. The general rule is, we count people where they live and stay most of the time, which is not the same as their voting address or their legal address," says Jim Dinwiddie of the U.S. Census Bureau's Decennial Management Division. "That has advantages and it has disadvantages, depending on what you're trying to do. Certainly there are people who would like to do it some other way. Certainly a lot of the proponents of this whole thing are suggesting that it is distorting the district boundaries and all of that. More often than not, correctional facilities are located in rural areas, and those people are considered part of the population there, and that affects all sorts of things."

"The main thing is that everybody understands this is how we do it, and then they can interpret the data the way they interpret the data," he adds. "States may want to look at how they do their districting or fund allocation within the state. Maybe they want to exclude popu-

lations in group quarters, which would include college dorms as well. That's up to them."

So far, according to Wagner, no states modify census data prior to redistricting, though momentum has been moving in that direction nationwide. "Illinois could be among the first," he says.

But there are some fears associated with tweaking the current way population-related business is done in Illinois. Although Ford's bill only applies to legislative redistricting, Cavaletto and others are concerned about the long-term financial implications of having a population count on the books in which prisoners are removed from the tally of the districts where the prisons are located.

Cavaletto says that Big Muddy River and Centralia, the two IDOC facilities in his district, bring education and other state and federal funds to the area, in addition to the business and jobs more directly connected to the facilities. He fears that any changes in population could negatively affect the already struggling, rural communities he represents.

According to Kelly Kraft at the Governor's Office of Budget Management, counties of incarceration receive funding based on the population count, particularly if the prison population bumps



that local community into the next funding bracket.

"The overall impact of having communities receive funding where prisons are located benefits that jurisdiction greatly, while the communities where inmates come from receive no 'credit' for that inmate having originally resided there," she wrote in an e-mail.

It's one reason that the downstate city of Centralia is trying to annex a state prison just outside its city limits.

Grant Kleinhenz, city manager for Centralia, says the Centralia Correctional Center, which houses 1,500 inmates, would bring in about \$130 per person per year through a bevy of different state taxes. "It does count as part of your population, particularly with the way that state shared revenues are distributed," he says. "That population would bring in an additional \$200,000 to our budget."

But to Ford, the revenue is just one more reason to count the prisoners at their home addresses.

Contrary to popular perception, Ford says, most inmates serve short sen-

tences, and the majority do go back to where they came from. When they do, he says, many of them struggle to find the resources they need to avoid going back to prison.

"You don't have those dollars to set things up for them when they come back from prison," he says. "Some of the areas that I represent deal with a lot of recidivism. ... People are in and out of jail because there are no resources for them when they are released from jail."

According to Chicago Metropolis' 2020 Crime and Justice Index, which compiles criminal justice-related data in the Chicago area over time, in 2005, the Illinois Department of Corrections released 39,031 people. (Its current population is just over 45,000.) Two-thirds of them returned to the Chicago area, mostly to a handful of communities — Austin, Humboldt Park, North Lawndale, West Englewood, East Garfield Park, Roseland and Auburn Gresham. All of them were low-income and predominantly African-American.

But Cavaletto called the initiative to count prisoners in their home districts

"nothing more than a grab for representation."

"When these people are paroled and they get out, they may not go back to Chicago. How are we going to keep track of where they are going? While they are here, they ought to be counted here," he says. "If you want to build a prison in Chicago and take them back, then they would be counted there. But the prisons were built here. And it just so happens that we are the people who house them."

Rep. Art Turner, who also represents a high-crime area of Chicago, introduced similar legislation in 2004 and 2005, but both efforts failed. But Ford is hoping this time will be different.

"That's the push right now, right? To make sure everyone is counted in their areas — not just for the resources but also the representation," says Ford. "This is the moment. We only have a chance to do this right every 10 years, and we really have to make this time count, now." □

*Jessica Pupovac is a Chicago-based free-lance writer.*

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## Alderman named to chair Illinois Commerce Commission



Manuel Flores

**Manuel Flores**, a Chicago alderman, was appointed chairman of the Illinois Commerce Commission — the first Latino to take that role.

Flores, who replaces former Rockford Mayor Charles Box, drew praise from Gov. Pat Quinn for his hard work as an alderman and his advocacy on behalf of environmental issues.

"I think he has a passion for something that's really, really important to our state of Illinois," Quinn said at a news conference announcing the appointment. "We've got to be a green state, a sustainable state.

We've got to embrace renewable energy and energy efficiency and water conservation. We need somebody who has foresight and vision for the green way of thinking."

Quinn lauded Flores for pushing for LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification in new developments, launching a social networking site to promote a green marketplace and leading the city's Green Exchange development, a mall targeting clean technology and energy companies.

Flores said, "This appointment is an important appointment because we're talking about chairing an organization that has to deal not only with utilities and water and communication but also making sure we're serving the everyday citizens of

Illinois and that we do so while moving the state forward" with green initiatives.

"I'm going to work tirelessly," Flores said. "We have a lot of challenges ahead of us. These are opportunities to make historic differences for the state of Illinois and for the people of Illinois."

The commerce commission serves as a bridge between consumers and Illinois utilities.

Elected to the Chicago City Council in 2003, Flores is a former prosecutor in the Cook County state's attorney's office and a former aide to U.S. Rep Luis Gutierrez.

Flores, a graduate of Dominican University and George Washington University Law School, also serves on the Illinois Broadband Deployment Council. His appointment requires Senate approval.

## Honors

Twenty-one Illinoisans and two groups received 2009 environmental hero awards from Illinois Gov. Pat Quinn.

They are:

- **Walter Bush IV**, education and employment manager for the Bronzeville Green project in Chicago.
- **Ray Coleman**, principal of St. Monica Academy in Chicago, who led environmentally sustainable upgrades to school grounds.
- **Garry Griffith**, director of dining at Augustana College in Rock Island, who spearheaded the school's Farm-to-Fork initiative in which students worked on local farms to produce crops used in the campus dining system.
- **Jack Harrier**, head custodian of Danville Unit School District 118, who installed energy efficient retrofits to buildings and made sure that school electronics and lights are powered down at night.
- **Debbie Hillman**, a co-founder of the Evanston Food Policy Council.
- **Michael Howard**, the founder and executive director of Eden's Place Nature Center in Chicago.
- **Madiem Kawa**, the founder and leader of Chicago's Washington Park Conservancy.
- **John Kidd**, founder of Fishin' Buddies! in Chicago, a nonprofit group that teaches students about wildlife conservation, prairie restoration and plant identification.

• **Chris Koos**, mayor of Normal, where the Uptown neighborhood is the first in the country to require LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification for new buildings.

• **Ben Magers and Kirstin Blackford** of Paxton, who were the only youth to attend the 2009 Illinois Department of Natural Resources Conservation Congress.

• **Mother McAuley and Thornridge high schools** in Chicago and Dolton, respectively, which are partnering to teach residents of Pinchon, Haiti, to make renewable biodiesel.

• **Julie Nold**, a Spanish teacher at Loyola Academy in Wilmette, who is the faculty supervisor for the ecology club Students Against Violating the Earth.

• **Orland Park's Green Team**, a group that visits area businesses to suggest how operations can be made cost-effective and more energy- and water-efficient.

• **L.H. Bert Princen** was director of the USDA Research Center in Peoria and conducted the National Audubon Christmas Bird Counts in Illinois. He died in 2008.

• **Debbie Raboin**, a teacher at O'Fallon Township High School, who partnered with state agencies and the Illinois Innovation Talent Program to lead students in designing a house for a local sustainable development.

• **Dinah Ramirez**, who directs Healthy Southeast Chicago, an organization that works toward environmentally sustainable solutions to health disparities in the Latino community.

• **Polly Rerko Dixon**, a parent at Wild Rose Elementary School in St. Charles, who started a vehicle anti-idling initiative.

• **Gary Swick**, who teaches science at Dundee-Crown High School in Carpentersville, where he worked with students to create an environmental science curriculum.

• **Tamara Tyszko** of Plainfield, who started Lakewood Falls Elementary School's first recycling program.

• **Bill Volk**, the managing director of the Champaign-Urbana Mass Transit District, who worked to develop diesel emission particulate filters now used in 50 buses.

• **Mark Wizniak**, a senior engineer at ComEd in Oak Brook, who partnered with state agencies and the Illinois Innovation Talent Pilot Program in an initiative to enlist high school students and teachers to perform energy audits in their schools.

• **Margie Woods** of Joliet, a former member of the Will County Board who championed the efforts of a subdivision to receive Illinois Environmental Protection Agency funds for improving the community's sewage and drinking water infrastructure.



## Blagojevich aides fined

The Illinois Executive Ethics Commission fined three aides to former Gov. Rod Blagojevich for using state resources to support President Barack Obama during his presidential campaign.

Former communications director **Abby Ottenhoff**, former deputy communications director **Rebecca Rausch** and former deputy governor **Sheila Nix** were found in violation of Illinois' State Officials and Employees Ethics Act after creating and issuing from Blagojevich's office a news release recognizing Obama's announcement of his candidacy for the presidency. Ottenhoff was fined \$1,500, while Rausch and Nix were each fined \$1,000.

The news release was issued on February 10, 2007, the same day Obama announced his candidacy in Springfield.

The news release, created on state time using state equipment, said that Blagojevich was "pleased to join many Illinoisans who are excited and proud to support Senator Obama in his bid for the presidency."

While the final draft of the news release included references to proposed legislation, initial drafts focused on Blagojevich's support of Obama's campaign. The ethics commission determined that regardless of the eventual mention of legislation, the news release constitutes political activity.

The commission determined Blagojevich was not included in discussions pertaining to the news release.

"We are disappointed with the Executive Ethics Commission's decision and believe it does not reflect our clients' intentions or the reality of the historic circumstances that surrounded Illinois in early 2007," says Matthew Ryan, attorney for Ottenhoff, Rausch and Nix.

Ryan says Ottenhoff, Rausch and Nix have no plans to appeal the fines.



## New fire marshal

**Larry Matkaitis** of Chicago has been named Illinois state fire marshal by Gov. Pat Quinn.

Matkaitis, who has been northern regional administrator in the office of State Fire Marshal since 2005, worked for 30 years in the Chicago Fire Department and is a member of the Illinois Terrorism Task Force.

For the Chicago Fire Department, Matkaitis served as executive assistant to the fire commissioner from 2004 to 2005. He was an assistant deputy fire commissioner from 2000 to 2004 and previously had been a paramedic and chief paramedic.

"The fire marshal is dedicated to protecting our well-being from fire safety and prevention to elevator inspection and review," Quinn said in a release.

"Larry brings a wealth of experience and dedication to this important role."

He attended Northern Illinois University and served in the U.S. Army from 1969 to 1975.

Matkaitis replaces acting fire marshal Dave DeFraties.


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University of Illinois Springfield

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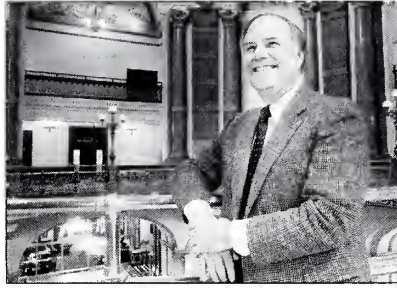
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Charles N. Wheeler III



## Is it really election time?

by Charles N. Wheeler III

In a few days, conscientious Illinois residents will bundle themselves up and trudge through midwinter weather to their nearest polling places, intent on doing their civic duty for the February 2 primary election.

Indeed, tens of thousands already have done so, taking advantage of an early voting period that opened before the Christmas lights were down and the decorations put away for another year.

One suspects many of them will be asking the same question: Why are we doing this NOW?

The answer is ... well, there's really no good answer, other than a midwinter primary gives incumbents a huge advantage over any would-be challengers. Consider: The typical officeholder is better known among constituents than a newbie. The incumbent has been raising money to run again since the day he or she first took office, unlike someone who's decided just lately to contest the seat. And if rotten weather keeps voters home, all the better for someone who has a seasoned team in place to get out a reliable base of support.

"I don't see that there's any benefit to the public in a February primary," says Ron Michaelson, a political science professor at the University of Illinois Springfield. "The holidays are just getting over, people are just starting to get back in the swing with school and work, and they realize in four weeks, there's a statewide

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Michaelson should know. Until he retired from the post in 2003, he was the first and only executive director of the Illinois State Board of Elections, a 29-year gig overseeing the state's election machinery.

May or June would be a better time for the primary, he believes. Even later could work, as it does for more than a score of states. An August primary would com-

press the election timetable but still be doable, Michaelson says. "And two months for the general election campaign is more than enough for candidates to get their message out."

The February primary "doesn't just cause problems for voters, but also for the people administering the election," adds Cook County Clerk David Orr, a strong advocate of a later primary.

Election officials have to recruit and train thousands of election judges, he notes, an effort complicated by the holidays and possible blizzard conditions. Similarly, harsh weather right before Election Day could interfere with authorities' ability to deliver voting materials and equipment to more than 11,500 precincts throughout the state.

When lawmakers moved the primary to early February from mid-March two years ago, the switch was sold as an effort to provide an early boost to then-U.S. Sen. Barack Obama's quest for the Democratic presidential nomination and to enhance Illinois' role in the nominating process. The Prairie State was not alone — 14 other states also held presidential primaries on February 5, 2008, and five others did so within the next two weeks.

But Illinois also chose to nominate party candidates for all offices in February, unlike 18 of the other 19 states, all of which filled out party slates in voting from mid-May through mid-September.

Only Maryland used its February 2008 primary for all offices, but this year, the Maryland primary is set for September 14.

Even New Hampshire, where its first-in-the-nation presidential primary is legendary, makes only out-of-staters tramp through the snowy woods in early January. Local candidates get to enjoy the fall foliage in September.

Indeed, after Illinois votes on February 2 and Texas casts its ballots a month later, no other state has a 2010 primary scheduled until early May, and 28 states are booked for June, July or August. Ten have September primaries.

After Labor Day is probably too late, Orr believes, given the complicated timetable built into the election law for dealing with contested primary results at the front end and getting absentee voting materials ready at the back end.

"I think anything works up to late August," Orr says. "There's nobody who would argue a February 2 primary is in the public interest."

Illinois did have a September primary

in the early 1900s, when the progressive idea of letting voters actually choose party nominees was just catching on. In fact, for a decade or so, the state held a presidential preference vote in April, then selected party nominees for other offices in September. The dual system ended in 1920, and from 1922 until 1964, April was the month.

The state switched to June in 1966 and 1968, then shifted to March for the 1970 primary. (Ironically, when the third Tuesday in March that year turned out to be St. Patrick's Day, embarrassed legislators quickly repealed the election law provision that required saloons to be closed while the polls were open.) Lawmakers last year introduced half a dozen bills calling for a later primary, most of them opting for June. But the legislation went nowhere, feeding the suspicion that party leaders like an early primary, when challengers walking precincts are knocking on doors in sub-freezing temperatures and voters are distracted by seasonal TV specials and holiday shopping until the final few weeks of the primary season.

In 1970, when Illinois moved to March from June, critics complained the shift to an earlier primary was designed to help incumbents and handicap challengers and would lead to exhausted voters and exorbitant campaign spending.

If an eight-month campaign season was too long and too costly 40 years ago — and the record since suggests both predictions were on target — tacking on another month in perpetuity is hardly an improvement.

Instead, lawmakers should take a cue from our sister states and recognize the wisdom of their forebears of a century ago. Keep an early February presidential primary, but choose party nominees for other offices in the summer, perhaps mid-June, after the spring legislative session. A later primary might mean incumbents have to work harder to keep their jobs, but they're sure to have the gratitude of all the folks shivering their way to the polls in coming days. □

*Charles N. Wheeler III is director of the Public Affairs Reporting program at the University of Illinois Springfield.*



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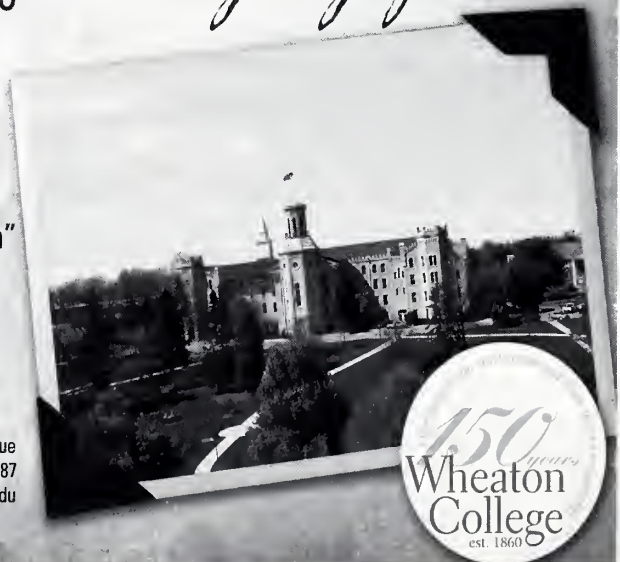
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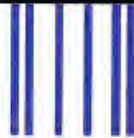
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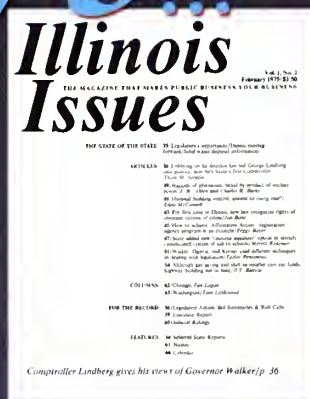
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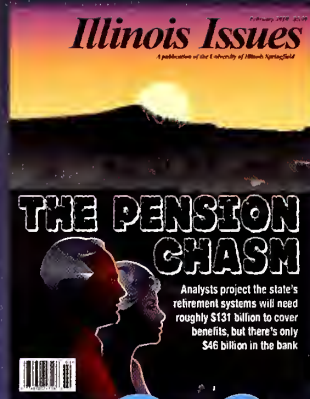
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